

Ho-Ming, girl of  
new China

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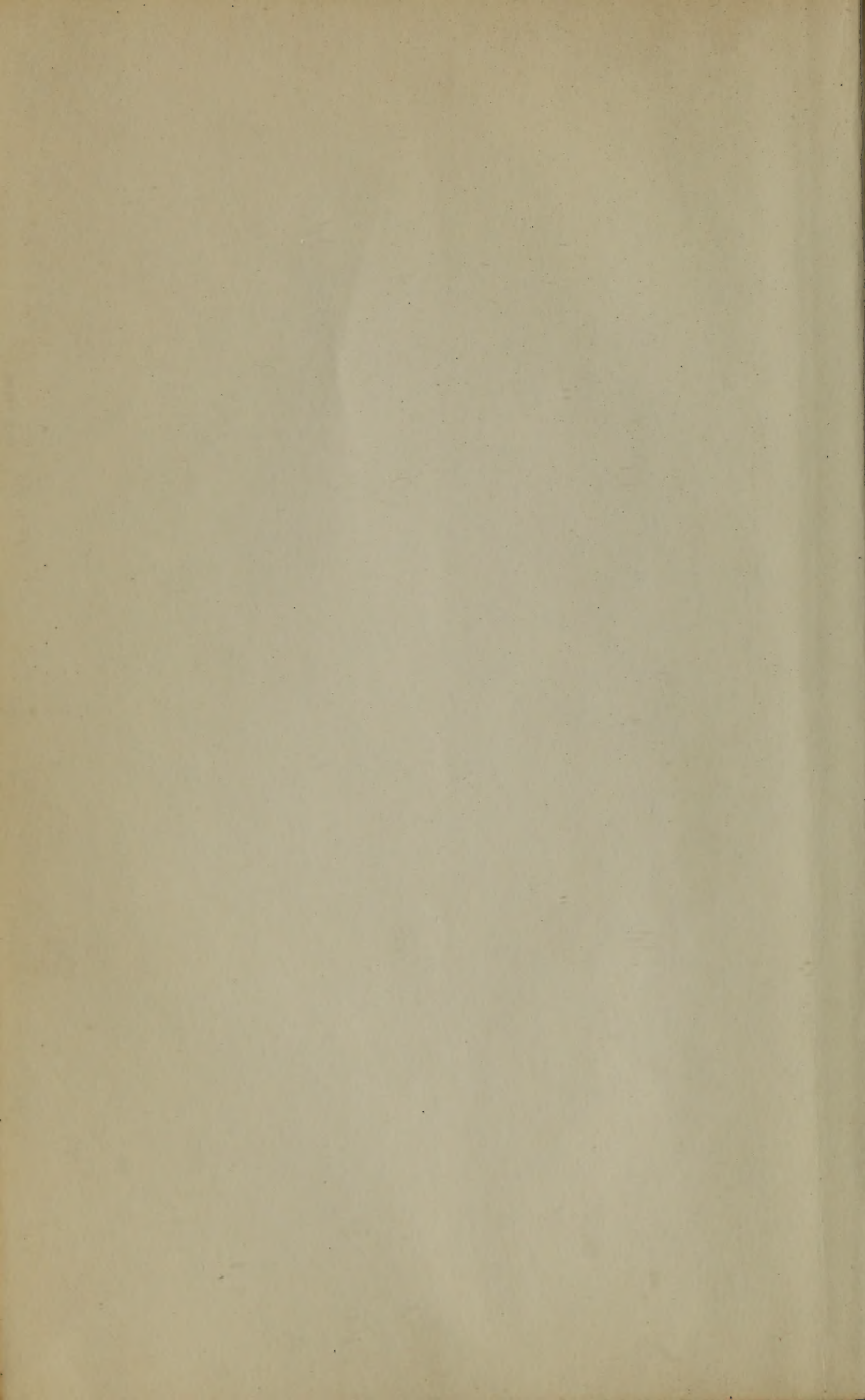
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Li's shop was a good place to decide what foods she would select

# HO-MING

## GIRL OF NEW CHINA

By  
**ELIZABETH FOREMAN LEWIS**

*Author of*  
**YOUNG FU of the Upper Yangtze**  
**AWARDED THE NEWBERY MEDAL**



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To  
the memory of  
JOHN ABRAHAM LEWIS  
whose integrity of life and spirit inspired this book  
and whose thoughtful criticism guided its contents  
the author dedicates  
whatever there may be found in it of worth



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## CHAPTER I

### FLOWING IN THE WATER, RUSHING ON THE WIND

AND is it not enough," complained Lao-Po-Po of her second granddaughter, "that she has feet as large as any coolie's? No! Also she must run about the streets alone, and at this advanced age."

"But ——"

"Hear me! When I was twelve years old, I had known for half that period my father's farmyard only, except on feast days. On such occasions I sometimes rode through the town with my mother in a sedan chair. Always the curtains were drawn closely, and when I, or my sisters, would have peeped through them, we were reminded promptly that girls should be neither

forward nor curious." She caught up the muslin sock she had been hemming, and with a brass thimble band prodded the needle viciously into the material.

Ho-ming, captive on the door sill to this argument between her mother and her grandmother, tossed a feathered shuttlecock through the air, caught it again deftly on the toe of her right shoe, and began to count the succeeding rhythmic flights: "Th, er, san, si, wu, luh, chi, bah, djiu, shi!" until she had reached fifty. At that point, interest, concerned primarily with the discussion of herself, wavered from the plaything, and she strained to listen as her mother replied in low, patient tones, "True it is, though she was twelve only a moon ago, that her years are too many for such freedom and I like it little. But customs change, and at present all over the land, it is said, girls copy their brothers' ways."

"Therefore," Lao-Po-Po returned sarcastically, "this girl-child must do the same, is it not so? An evil moment it was when her father (even though he is my eldest son, I say it!) ordered her feet unbound. With no reason but that she cried! Did not her sister two years earlier weep as bitterly? Is it something new for girls to fret over foot-binding? Never in the history of the Sung house has a maid walked on such ugliness. As for this liberty of which you speak," her voice lowered warningly, "no good will come of it!"

Mother sighed. "You speak wisely, Ancient One, but bean oil we must have if the mien tonight is to be worth the eating, and who else then is to go for it?"



Grandmother's annoyance vented itself on the sewing, but she made no further protest in speech. Glancing within for permission, Ho-ming received the bottle and copper cash and started on the errand down the street. She moved sedately enough until her home was no longer in view. There her pace quickened at a rate that broke completely all traditional rules for dignified carriage. Long before today she had discovered that speed over uninteresting stretches of the way left her with leisure for more selective enjoyments; and these public appearances, becoming as they were less frequent with each month of increased age, were the only remaining highlights of what she considered an otherwise very dull life.

"Dull," her fourteen-year-old sister, Mei-li, had once echoed the younger girl's complaint, "dull — with so much to be done every minute? What you find of such interest on the Great Street, I do not understand. Shops, yes, but if one has no money to spend — what then? Seldom as I go there, I am glad always to leave the crowds and return home."

Ho-ming's eyes had widened. "But what," she insisted, "is to be seen here that is new? Day after day the same fowls, the same pigs, the same water buffalo — indeed, Old Shui-niu has been with us since I was born! On the Great Street strange sights there are, and no one can say what next may happen."

"With you, even here, no one can say what next may happen!" Mei-li replied with sudden humor, after which they had both giggled until Lao-Po-Po

called out sharply, "And is there no work to be done in this house?"

Such teasing was common in Ho-ming's experience. In twelve years of existence, curiosity and a sense of adventure had led her regularly into scrapes and out of them. Grandmother scolded and Mother grew serious over these exploits; only Father's eyes twinkled with mirth that time and farming difficulties had failed to quench. "Lay down your heart!" he would counsel his wife, "she is much like me when I was her age."

Today as she hurried along in blue cotton jacket and trousers, Ho-ming looked as might any other small Chinese girl dutifully bent on the purchase of bean oil, but there the resemblance ended. Household duties were an inescapable part of the daily pattern; her mind, however, recognized no limiting boundaries and strayed far afield. Every part of the shifting color of the streets was registered on the alert black eyes, and the thick braid of hair swung in almost constant motion as her head moved from one distraction to another. Once on the main thoroughfare, she became an actively interested spectator of each phase of life about her and she was loath to leave the scene even a few moments for the narrower confines of Li's food shop.

Having at last crossed the threshold, she peered with pleasurable curiosity at the iron basins of food and condiment and considered briefly the possible satisfaction to one's appetite in living under this roof. There were times, though she never failed to clear the

last trace of rice from the bowl, when her diet might be improved, she felt, by occasional additions of some of the delicacies here offered for sale.

"Each time food is opened you eat as though you had fasted all of your life!" Grandmother would remark petulantly. "Your appetite is greater than that of your brother who labors in the fields."

"And is it my fault, Je-je," Ho-ming would later demand of Mei-li in a moment of privacy, "that I am so often hungry? Moreover, Lao-Po-Po receives the choicest bits from each dish — why then ——?"

"Shh! Is she not old and our father's mother? Some day you, too, may be a mother-in-law and at every meal, perhaps, have meat and vegetables with your rice."

Well, Ho-ming told herself, Li's shop was a good place to decide what foods she would select for that future delight. Bustling housewives pressed into the room. Here and there among them a figure in flowered calico or a baby in scarlet cap offered contrast to the conventional blue. Glow from a smoky lamp passed over the black sateen crowns encircling most foreheads, cast highlights on sleek coils of hair, and seized for its own use the gleam from a silver pin or bracelet.

At this hour, with the evening meal in preparation, necessary purchases of food or fuel supplied recreation and social contact to many who had been toiling since dawn. Voices rose in ejaculations of laughter or surprise; whispers of gossip wove sly threads in the fabric of conversation; a fretful infant whined its discomfort,



and two old women compared in detail the maladies afflicting them at present.

Ho-ming looked about her and sighed. She was near the end of a long line of customers, and at the moment the food merchant, with a surprising disregard for the demands of trade, was listening attentively to an elderly man who leaned across the counter.

A woman motioned impatiently in the shopkeeper's direction. "My husband brings home his friend for evening rice and I have still much to do," she explained, apologizing for her haste to those about her. Several smiled in understanding, and all in turn began to stare at this visible obstacle to trade. As their chatter lessened, the man's deep tones echoed through the room, "Even though the present inns cannot care for the many strangers who come by the Wuhu bus, is that an excuse for the size of this new tea house? What but evil can result from such trifling with the Feng-Shui (supernatural spirits) of this place? Truly I had not supposed men could be so foolish!"

Li Merchant narrowed his eyes, then swiftly as if a beating gong had reminded him of duty, returned to the patron nearest, ladled out her order of meat sauce, rang the copper coins on the wooden board, and looked questioningly at the next purchaser. "You speak with reason," he assured his troubled visitor a little later, picking up the frayed end of conversation as unexpectedly as he had dropped it, "though in these times men tempt Heaven in strange ways." He wrapped the most recent selection of fried dough strips in coarse

brown paper, twisted a noose of straw about the middle, and pushed it forward.

"And do they escape punishment?" demanded an old woman who had been listening attentively to each word. "What of Tu who permitted his wife to help dig their well? Could the priests find any reason other than the woman's presence to account for the immediate death of Tu's six hogs?" Her tongue clicked for emphasis. "And do you forget Wen, son of the money lender," she continued, "who traveled for a year and returned puffed by his experience like a fowl prepared for the market? 'Enlightened people in the great world where I have been,' he told his family, 'do not use spirit-screens at the entrance to their dwellings, nor will I, do I but gain my father's permission to tear it down!' I, myself (his mother is my friend), heard him say it. And when Wen the Elder, wearied by the scornful persistence of this youth, finally agreed — in the very act of removing the screen, did not a sudden wind blow a tile from the house roof and crack Wen the Younger's head?" She cackled gleefully over this proof of justice.

The first speaker nodded agreement, "Ai, men pay for their daring in such matters. And in this instance," he turned again to Li, "you and I, innocent of all but living close to the water shop, may suffer with the guilty." With this gloomy prediction he passed into the street.

The customers now crowded about the counter. "What water shop and what tea house are these?"

"Chen's," Li pointed with his chin to a small place opposite his own. "A new tea house is needed in the town, and they would build it on that spot," he added, then measured out duck livers and mushrooms for the woman whose husband was bringing home a friend.

Ho-ming, listening intently to each word of the conversation, felt her interest stray for a brief second to contemplation of these delicacies. Duck livers and mushrooms! Her nostrils dilated and she licked her lips with the edge of a small pink tongue. Duck livers ——!

"So, a new tea house! Chen's business — what of it?" was the next question.

"Yes, what of Chen?" the old woman repeated. "That he is ruined, perhaps, is bad, but this is worse — three stories high will they build that place."

"Three stories high! Three stories and in the center of town? What of its shadow? Small wonder the Old One spoke of Feng-Shui! My own home will be darkened by it — ai-ya! And mine! And mine!" The chorus of protest swelled.

"Three stories — that large," Li Merchant repeated. "The room beneath the roof will be used sometimes as a theater."

"A queer custom, indeed, to have a theater indoors! From ancient times have the actors performed in the fields — how then is this?"

"My native city," a recent bride interrupted, "has three such theaters. Many people attend. I, myself,



went once with my parents.” Suddenly aware of raised eyebrows and critical stares, she flushed, made a timid request of the shopkeeper, paid for the purchase, and left without further word.

“Now do we know how her family rears its unmarried daughters—permitting them to frequent public places!” came the disapproving comment while Ho-ming exchanged cash for bean oil and followed in the bride’s steps.

On the threshold the twelve-year-old girl stopped and looked after the other. That one would doubtless think twice before she spoke freely again of her distant home and its customs!

Opposite, at this the busiest hour of the day, a steady stream of customers passed in and out the water shop, and the clink of metal rose harshly above other sounds as Chen and his assistant filled burnished brass and copper kettles from steaming caldrons. Three buildings, one above the other, would soon grow on this very spot. Nothing in the town, except perhaps the pagoda at the river’s edge, was so high. An affair, indeed! Today the time spent in Li’s store had not been wasted; this news would startle even Grandmother into listening.

Through the congestion of the narrow, crooked thoroughfare Ho-ming moved slowly homeward. A group of load-donkeys, bridle bells tinkling, filed wearily into a stable yard. To the left a passenger stepped from between lowered ricksha shafts and became involved at once in altercation with his runner concerning

fare. She listened with an impartial air to the stormy discussion of rates and the eventual compromise. Bearers to a colorful sedan chair halted to shift weight from one shoulder to another and shouted the usual rime, "Ban ko; kuai tso! (Change over; swiftly walk!)" Weaving in and out of traffic, venders shook rattles, beat tiny drums, rang brass bells to advertise trays and cases of food slung before them on straps about their bodies, or swinging from the ends of carrying poles. Ho-ming's eyes lighted as an old man, crying, "Do-fu, do-fu!" made his way through the crowd, then recognizing her, halted in greeting, "Have you eaten evening rice, Me-me?"

She ducked in curtsy. "I have not eaten, Lu Food-vender, I came on the street to buy sauce." With his tempting stock of bean-curd so close, it was difficult to keep her gaze demurely on the ground as was proper when one spoke in public with a man. Then, although there was no excuse for further conversation, she added with marked solicitude, "And are all well under your roof?"

Her elderly companion controlled a twitch of amusement. "All are well, Me-me." Dishing up a portion, he placed the jellied square on a green leaf and held it out. "I spent heart on this curd today, yet it is of poor quality; you will do me honor to accept some."

Ho-ming bowed gravely. "Most unworthy am I of this excellent gift, Food-vender — a hundred times I thank you!" Then as his attention turned to a more

remunerative customer, she skipped three steps forward, and ran headlong against a coolie carrying river water in two wooden buckets. "Have a care, you!" the bearer shouted angrily above the splash. Lifting his head from under the shoulder pole, he noticed the scared childish face and continued less harshly, "Look where you walk, Me-me! The silversmith will not pay the fee due me for this."

With cheeks redder than usual, Ho-ming apologized and entered a cross lane to the next parallel road. If she had not skipped! Her stocking was wet and almost she had dropped the bean-curd. Would she never learn to walk as was proper for her age? She reached her own home, at the back of which lay open fields, just as Yuen-san, her senior by one year, flung to the winds water from a basin in which he had just washed arms and legs free of soil. Hastily she jumped, but too late to escape the drops spattering her trousers. "Have a care, you!" she threatened her brother in the coolie's speech of a moment earlier. "Look at my jacket! And if I had spilled that bean oil, what then?" This was too much!

Yuen-san stood staring, eyebrows lifted. "What a temper! And is that the way to speak to your superior?" Then frowning suddenly in mock terror, he added, "Ai-ya, it is Old Lady Wang in her best satin gown! Pity me, Mistress, I thought you were only that worthless girl the beggars left here!"

Under the teasing, Ho-ming's irritation vanished in a giggle. Of the family, this one was her favorite.



She held out the square of bean-curd. "See, Go-go, this the food-vender gave me!" Setting the bottle on the sill beside her, she measured off a fourth of the delicacy in her hand. "That for you, this for Mother, this for Je-je, and this," plopping it into her mouth, "for me."

From within the house a voice called, "Hurry a little, Me-me! Your father waits for his food."

Hiding the remains of the curd beneath the tail of her jacket, Ho-ming caught up the bottle and stepped inside. If Lao-Po-Po saw what Lu Food-vender had given her, questions and a scolding would follow. For the time, until Mother and Mei-li were freer, the shadows on the spinning wheel offered temporary storage space. Then placing the bean oil on the table, she began to serve bowls of hot mien.

Grandmother, to whom Mei-li was attending, sat by herself with her feet on a stool. Mother still hung over the hot stove; when all had been cared for, she sank down on a bench and began her meal. The two girls stood and ate as best they could between periods of refilling the bowls. In the ensuing silence, broken only by the click-clack of chopsticks against china, Ho-ming asked, "Where will Chen sell hot water when he leaves that shop?"

"Chen?" her mother repeated. "Why should he leave his shop?"

"That a tea house may be built."

Father poised food midway between the bowl and his mouth. "What tea house?"

The others looked up at her curiously and, conscious of new importance, Ho-ming began to spin her information thread by thread. "A tea house and theater, three stories piled on each other, where Chen's place now is."

Yuen-san drooped one eyelid, "Me-me dreams," he remarked.

"Not so! I heard it at the food shop. Li Merchant and another man talked; later the customers asked many questions; I listened."

"Who was this other man?" Father wished to know.

"I did not recognize him, but that he was important was certain — his long garment and short one were both of gray silk." She paused in recollection, "His heart was very hot."

"The snake and the tiger each wears a fine coat, but their reputations are questionable," Lao-Po-Po contributed. "However, if this be true," her countenance sobered, "there is reason for hearts to be hot."

"Chen has sold water there since I was no larger than Me-me," Mother reminded them. "I wonder where he will now open business."

"Since that druggist returned to Japan, his place has been boarded up; also there is an empty room between the two pottery stores," Yuen-san suggested.

"And have you become an astrologer overnight that you can choose so easily a suitable location for a man to trade?" demanded Grandmother, whose brows were suddenly furrowed with thought.

Father's chopsticks resumed their activity as he swung long strings of mien into his mouth. Finished,

he grunted with satisfaction, stretched arms wearily above his head, then reached for the pipe that Mei-li held out. "It is bad fortune that Chen does not own his shop, but under his roof there have always been many rice bowls to fill." He pressed down the thimbleful of tobacco, then struck a spark from the flint. "So they will build a tea house and a theater in the very center of town. For those who have money to spend, good!" Pulling at the long reed stem he watched smoke curl upward from the tiny bowl. "Once in Wuhu I went to a theater like that. More exciting it was than those in the fields. Had I silver in plenty I would go again."

"And can you think of nothing more than pleasure, my son? 'Three stories high,' she said," Grandmother repeated in horrified tones, "and not a building in this whole place that great in size! The spirits of wind and water — has no one considered them? A tea house so tall that the carriers of good fortune will light on its roof and seek no farther to travel! This roof above us in a direct line with the hot-water shop — what of it? Only evil will find us in the future. Ai-ya, that I should have lived to see this day!"

"Lay down your heart!" her son attempted soothingly. "Wuhu has high buildings and in Shanghai, it is said, men outdo each other in living near the sky."

"What men do in distant cities, I care not! Only one question I would ask: what happens to the people who live in the shadow of those great buildings? Has anyone told you that?"



"No," was the somewhat sheepish reply, "but three years since, when the foreigners, who would teach us new doctrines, built their tall chimney, it was said harm would come of that, too. Three years have passed and we remain the same."

"And is your memory so bad," Lao-Po-Po inquired in a tone of exaggerated politeness, "that you forget the farmer living outside their wall whose crops failed and whose children shook and burned with disease?"

"Crops failed, as often before in that spot, because the soil was sour. As for those children ——" he hesitated.

Triumphantly his mother stepped into the breach. "Ah, wisdom deserts you! Stupid though I am, one lesson I have learned." Her voice lowered ominously. "When men close the paths of wind and water which the spirits use, misfortune follows. If the ways of the air are not open, the forces that would bring us good are discouraged; those of evil purpose are but angered the more." Abruptly she lifted a bit of food from her bowl, rose, and placed the offering before the image of the Kitchen God above the stove. "Tomorrow," she continued after several moments of silence, "tomorrow I go early to the temple. It may be the priests will have a new charm against this coming ill."

Later, on the crude plank bed which she shared with Mei-li, Ho-ming rolled herself in her comfort, then asked, "Do you think harm will really come to us because of the new tea house?"

"Why ask me?" Mei-li replied. "You, yourself, heard Grandmother. Though Lu's daughter, who attends their school, says the foreigners teach that good and evil spirits have little to do with men's fortunes. She was not, however, very sure that they knew — they say so many foolish things."

Ho-ming lay still, lost in thought. Lu's daughter was being taught strange things at the foreign school. She wished she might do books in a school — even that of the foreigners would be better than none. The small bamboo box in which she kept her treasures was stuffed with torn scraps of newspaper and advertising matter salvaged from the streets. One of the successful merchants in the town paid a small boy to collect these fragments, and place them in specially prepared wooden pockets on street walls for preservation from the indignities of mire and trampling feet. This public reverence for the printed word added to one's reputation as a citizen. But with Ho-ming such acquisition proved her closest approach to learning and was a purely private affair.

In idle moments she sorted these tag ends of paper and puzzled over the printed characters. Father possessed two books, but he could not read them. They were wrapped carefully in a square of unbleached muslin and occupied a place of honor on a shelf. Ho-ming had pulled them down twice; once to receive a scolding from Mother, and the second time, when Lao-Po-Po had seen her and told, a beating had been the result. Punishment, however, had failed to curb her interest

in these volumes. Perhaps some day she would learn to recognize words. Then she would say, "Father, if you will let me see those books, I will now read them to you." Father would be proud of his learned daughter. He would answer, "Certainly, certainly!" and himself hand her the books.

Speedily as it had swelled, this balloon of fancy burst. In this family where even the one son could not afford to study, was it likely a daughter would be given that chance?

Through a ragged tear in the oiled paper of the window she could see clouds scudding over the face of the moon. Outlined against this background was a neighboring thatched roof, at one corner of which the sharp spring wind tugged fiercely. As she watched the straw rise and fall in the struggle, all of Grandmother's forebodings rushed into her mind. Evil spirits, everyone knew, used methods like this to force entrance into dwellings. Well, the roof above her was tiled and each corner curved upward that demons bent on mischief might find no footing thereon. Reassured, she snuggled closer to Mei-li's sleeping form, and after a little, there in the warm shadows, her mind forgot its fears.

In the town one householder and then another secured his family and possessions against intrusion. Lights, visible only through cracks, flickered out one by one; sleek gray rats and an occasional dog roamed the deserted roads; from the direction of the ya-men, where the official dwelt and held his court, sounded the clack-clack of a watchman's rattle telling the community



that all was well. And if Chen, keeper of the hot-water shop, or his neighbors, or Lao-Po-Po lying wide-awake in the silent darkness, disputed his announcement in their minds, he did not know it. Night had once more folded the countryside in peace.





## CHAPTER II

### WANTED — AT ONCE: ONE PUBLIC BENEFACTOR

ONE morning several weeks later as she stood with Mei-li feeding silkworms the last of a supply of mulberry leaves, Ho-ming's thoughts wandered again to Lu's daughter and her opportunities. "Je-je," she asked suddenly, forcing a worm to creep unnecessary lengths for the leaf in which it was interested, "why does Lu's daughter do books — she is not very bright."

Mei-li's voice rose in reproof at sight of her sister's mischief, "How can they grow and spin, if you starve them now?" she demanded, then in a gentler tone, "because her father is gardener for the foreigners."

“And do I not know that?”

“Well, you know also that she had smallpox! And ‘when one’s face resembles a melon rind that chickens have pecked, a good marriage is difficult to arrange!’ ” quoted Mei-li. “The parents of the youth, to whom she would otherwise now be promised, objected. I heard Lao-Po-Po tell Mother. What then can she do but study?”

“I would rather do books than marry,” Ho-ming decided.

With improvised chopsticks of straw Mei-li guided her ravenous charges safely toward the remaining leaves. At this period of existence they were small, wriggling dynamos of appetite which no amount of effort on the part of their human keepers succeeded in appeasing for very long. “You will have to find fresh mulberry today,” was her next comment; “there is no more. As for your marrying,” she paused to glance at the vivacious face before her, then continued mischievously, “the go-between will, I fear, have even more trouble securing a husband for you. Your hair is often untidy, your nose is but a small lump of clay and,” one eyelid closed appraisingly, “in a little time you will be fat.” As an afterthought she added with sadness, “Also Lu’s girl does have an excellent disposition.”

There was a swift pull at the speaker’s long plait of hair, and the tray wobbled, its contents rolling about wildly. From the rear of the house where Mother cared for a litter of pigs came the gentle rebuke, “Much work there is to do before midday rice.”



At once the scuffle ceased. "True," Mei-li admitted ruefully, "I have still the pots to scour and the rooms to sweep." She pushed the tray toward Ho-ming, moved across the room, ladled water from a gong, and, catching up her short, stiff hand broom, began to scrape about the bottom of the caldron.

For a few minutes the younger girl gave her task undivided attention. Until spinning began, what nuisances silkworms were! She picked up one of the largest and held it between her and the light. As they approached the industrious season of their lives, their bodies became almost transparent. Annoyed by this one's failure to progress, Ho-ming laid it down none too gently. She liked these creatures only when permitted to garner the fruits of their toil. To dip the cocoons in boiling water until soft, prick the thread loose with a needle, then unwind the long, soft strand was interesting enough. At such moments she longed for the numbers to increase magically that reels of sheen might remain in the household for future weaving. Instead of this, the usual results were bits of coarse raw silk to be sold to some dealer for a few coppers. With homemade dyes glowing fabrics could be wrought — scarlet for a bride's robe, the blue of kingfisher wings, or golden amber like the beads on a Buddhist rosary. She sighed. Farmers' daughters did not wear richly colored brocades. Common blue cotton only was needed for feeding silkworms or sifting grain or caring for fowls. Lu's girl had a flowered calico jacket for important days at school. While Ho-ming had no wish

to experience the Flowery Disease as had the gardener's daughter, still when all was considered, the price seemed small for the privileges resulting in this instance.

Setting the tray of worms close to the banked fire, she caught up a shallow basket and started on her quest for more leaves. Without conscious direction, her feet led her across the fields toward the foreign school. This morning with the thought of Lu's girl uppermost in mind, her interest in the place grew deeper. Just outside the compound she halted, and in that moment the object of envy and all her doings sank into the background.

Tall and symmetrical beyond the high stone wall a mulberry tree rested one great arm on the coping, and through lacy branches cast a tempting shadow over the public roadway where she stood. Leaves in plenty and good ones, she told herself — enough, if she could reach and strip the limb without detection, to last for many days. If — that was the problem. For careless though these foreigners were in the location of such a prize (Would any Chinese foolishly plant a mulberry where it invited attention?) — it was quite possible that the same stupid creatures might be unreasonable about sharing the leaves with others.

Ho-ming's shoulders shrugged; it was not her plan to force this issue, not if dexterity could avoid it. The lane at the moment was deserted. On tiptoes she crept close to the wall and strained to listen. From the other side of the graystone barrier came the slap-slap of a gardener's feet — Old Lu's she supposed! Abruptly the

shrill, repeated call of a rice bird cut the air, and the eavesdropper tightened her lips with irritation. How, then, with such noise could she hear when the gardener moved from this spot? That bird! Swiftly she smothered her annoyance. One did not wish ill to rice birds, certainly not until the rice crop had been harvested, otherwise ——!

The bird's notes ceased as unexpectedly as they had begun, and the gardener's footsteps grew fainter in the distance. Ho-ming lifted a forked stick deftly into the air, caught and bent the branch nearer her and began to fill the basket with leaves. When the lower twigs were bared, she grew less cautious of sound and movement, and panic seized her as a voice demanded accusingly, "Since there is no wind, how does that mulberry move?" With an indignant swish the captive branch swung upward and the culprit fled.

Two cross streets away she paused to regain breath, then studied her spoils with satisfaction. Good! In two hours of searching the countryside, she could not have found so many, and the task was already done. This unexpected leisure was a gift straight from the gods, and she had no idea of wasting it by an immediate return to home and housework. She glanced about her. This road, certainly, gave no exciting answer to her desires. Her eyes narrowed calculatingly, and after a moment she set out on the long walk to the Great Street.

She had not been on that thoroughfare since the evening in Li's food shop, and in the meantime much



had happened. Chen's store had been torn down, and a well-laid foundation had taken its place. From the beginning trouble had accompanied the work.

Lao-Po-Po had, as first planned, gone to the priests and purchased charms. These bits of paper, covered with secret symbols, had been duly posted on the roof and at all house openings. Daily since then she had paid marked attention to the kitchen god, filching for him the choicest bits from each meal. There had remained, so far as the old woman could see, nothing for her to do, and she had refused stubbornly to discuss the matter further. Demons were, after all, notoriously stupid, and to show no interest in their activities was to persuade them that one had nothing worth harming; then they might seek adventure elsewhere.

As the building progressed, however, this reasoning failed to comfort her, and she would sit and stare by the hour in the direction of the clamor. One morning while she was mending in the usual sunny spot before the door, an unexpected cry brought the others swiftly to her side. "What is it, Old One," asked her daughter-in-law, "do you have pain?"

With trembling finger Grandmother pointed to a skeleton framework of wood and bamboo high above the surrounding rooftops. Men were conducting the ceremony of raising the ridgepole. "Look! look!" she whispered, "that high it will be. With such walls to hinder them, how can good fortune ever again visit us? Ai-ya — and all of this trouble because foreigners build another of their temples!"

"Not foreigners," Mother corrected gently, "and not a temple, but a tea house where men may play, if they will."

Under provocation Lao-Po-Po's voice returned in full strength, "Foreigner or someone else again — what does it matter? And whether temple or tea house — who knows but the meaning may be the same? In the city where I was born, each year the priests hold fairs in the temple courtyard — in that way their money bags are filled. Are these barbarians any less greedy? For barbarians they must be or they would not build so high. That chimney on the foreign school — was there ever one in this region like it? 'Chimneys must be tall,' it is said they told the stone mason, 'that smoke may go up them.' And be wasted on the cold without! What nonsense! What use is fire smoke if not to heat the inside of the house? When the air becomes too thick, open the door a crack. Moreover, do any but these strangers have fires in schools where books are meant to be studied and not food to be cooked?"

The two girls had been standing quietly in the doorway during this argument. Timidly Mei-li ventured, "Grandmother, Lu's daughter says the chimney is in the room where teachers dwell, not where the students work."

Lao-Po-Po's eyes flashed, "First your mother contradicts me and now you copy her ways! In my home we were taught to respect our elders, but in this household neither courtesy nor custom is observed!"

Ai! but Grandmother had a temper, Ho-ming told herself at the recollection as she walked along. And if the former knew that her second granddaughter was at present on the main highway instead of a country lane, what would ——? With a grin she left the question unfinished — what Lao-Po-Po did not know need cause her no anxiety.

Reaching the site of the new building, Ho-ming found the street blocked by coolies who chanted rhythmically, "Hai-ho, hai-ho!" as they strained at the bamboo ropes which pulled a massive log along the narrow way. Close to her stood two men watching the laborers' efforts and talking earnestly together.

"In a moon and one half we can open this place for business," the younger remarked with confidence.

"Good — if only these country workmen can forget their fears!"

The first speaker twisted his lip with annoyance. "They are like old women with their talk of Feng-Shui. This morning I told the foreman who, Heaven be thanked, comes from Wuhu and is used to working on something more than one-story huts, to promise each man extra tea money if they complete the work on the day set. Silver helps men to forget their fears."

"Perhaps!" rejoined his companion, "though I like not the air of this place. There is no joking between workmen. Some are friends of the man who sold hot water here, and he can find no favorable location to start a new business. The town elder who lives over there has illness in his family. He says this



building keeps good fortune from his rooftop. I have heard the astrologer suggests changes in the openings of the house to counteract evil, but the owner is unwilling to make them."

The other laughed shortly. "'Call in an astrologer and build a new house,'" he quoted, then went on confidently, "lay down your heart! I am younger than you, but I know these countrymen. When the tea house is opened, they will step on each other's heels to patronize us."

The men moved on. So Chen could not earn a living and one of the town elders was very angry! Ho-ming glanced at the plastered wall that separated this important one's home from the street. Well, his was not the only household with illness. Strange forces were at work in the town, and almost every family complained of trouble in some form or other. So far, in spite of Lao-Po-Po's fears, the Sungs had escaped affliction.

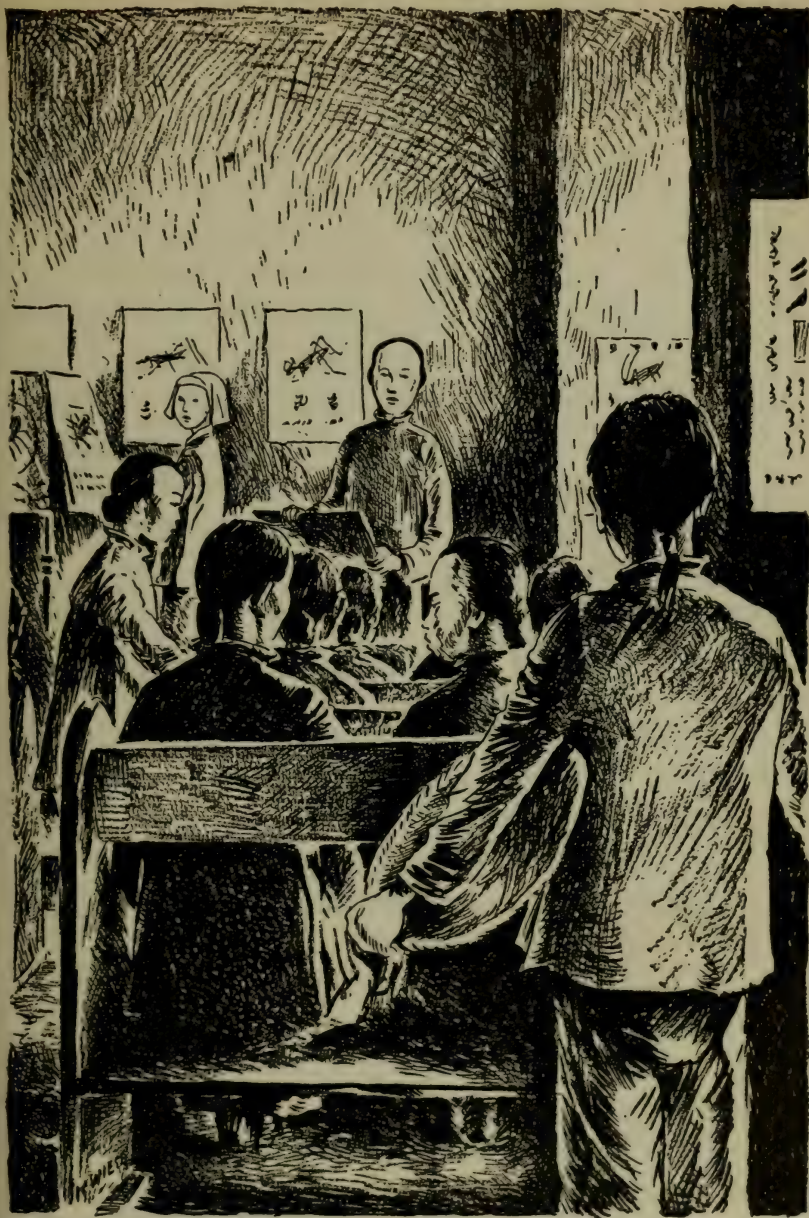
Her attention turned once more to the ill-omened structure. In less than two moons, they had said, its doors would open to customers. If only such places were for women and girls, also! She would like to go within one time, at least. "Bring me your best tea, Serve-food-man," she would order, "some hot Hsiao-bing, several pieces of air-blown candy, and a portion of watermelon seeds browned to a crisp!" The humor of this unlikely situation, and of her elders' scandalized expression might they know her thoughts, amused her. Then she sobered. Always the things

one most desired to do were not proper — how had she ever happened to be a girl?

This meditation was broken in upon by a chattering group of women who followed the Chinese woman doctor, called Wei, and her assistant nurse into a small street chapel. Ho-ming watched them curiously. So many women could not be sick, and if they were, why go in this foreign temple instead of to Wei Ih-Seng's own public dispensary? This must be something out of the ordinary. Never had she been in one of the barbarians' temples. This was the only one in the community and it had, for reasons unknown to her, been closed three years. Surely with so many towns-women in the deserted building, no harm could come to her. She drew closer to the entrance, and in another moment had wriggled a way into the rear of the room. There she looked about, discovered with relief that none of her own immediate neighbors were in this group, then proceeded to study the surroundings.

To her amazement the place held no statues of gods or goddesses. Instead, colored posters, temporarily displayed for lecture purposes, vied for attention on all of the available wall space; familiar pictures — contrasting bound and unbound feet; more unusual ones of rats and vermin busily carrying disease and death, of cholera and tuberculosis and plague swooping down on unsuspecting victims. Strange decorations for a temple, indeed! Though it might be some of these were the foreign idea of the spirit world of punishment. With each glance she became more confused. Her gaze





Ho-ming's gaze shifted suddenly to the chief actors in this scene



shifted suddenly to the chief actors in this scene. Beside a small table at the front Wei Doctor stood waiting while the nurse arranged sheets on a revolving chart.

The physician, about thirty years of age, was slender and of medium height. In repose her face was grave, but interest brought an excited sparkle to eyes and a flush to cheeks. She wore garments that were plain of cut and quiet in color; her feet were shod in low-heeled foreign shoes; and on one wrist was a watch of American make. Her native place, it was said, lay but a few miles distant, and her family, one of wealth, had permitted its only daughter the unusual opportunity of studying first in Nanking and then later in the Medical College at Peiping.

Why so learned a woman should have returned to live in this small town puzzled Ho-ming. Indeed, Wei Doctor, herself, sometimes wondered at the same circumstance. She had finished her courses with honor and had been offered positions in several large centers. On the verge of accepting one of these, some latent loyalty to her own section and its needs, where medical methods were much the same as they had been for centuries, had influenced her to locate in this rural district and open a small dispensary. In the one year of her residence she had given lavishly of time and energy to a program of Public Health. So far she had received no apparent coöperation, but the townspeople, nonetheless, admired and acknowledged her as a person of importance. And today as she lifted a hand for attention, respectful silence was accorded her first words.

Twenty minutes raced by, twenty minutes of such strange teaching that Ho-ming's head whirled. Mosquitoes had been the subject of the lecture, and on the chart, one kind had followed another: giant mosquitoes magnified to cover a sheet of the paper; smaller ones in clouds hovering about doorways and rooftops; individual mosquitoes and their families rising from water-gongs, stinging sleeping victims, torturing babies, spreading everywhere the dreaded Shaking Disease.

At the end the young physician had grown vehement with earnestness, "More evil do these pests bring to this town than war or flood or locusts! These others we recognize as enemies, but mosquito demons we treat as friends, permitting them to live and breed in our houses and dooryards. As a result even the strongest among us shiver and burn with the Shaking Disease; several tens of patients there are to whom I feed the white powder daily, and those who die, die needlessly. It is the mosquito devils who should perish. In no better way can you become a public benefactor than to kill them. Do not let one escape! Burn your piles of rubbish! Sprinkle foreign oil on your mud puddles! Free your homes of these pests and save your families from illness!"

So mosquitoes were devils, Ho-ming told herself slipping out before the women and hurrying toward home. This was, of course, no new doctrine. Demons were known to bring all misfortune, disease and death in particular; they were believed as well to change

their forms at will. What was surprising, though, was that they should choose to look like mosquitoes. No — as mosquitoes they would find it easy to fly over the new tea house. She was astonished to recall that Wei Ih-Seng had not once mentioned the latter. War, flood, locusts, and mosquitoes — these last the worst of all, but not the tall building. With a gesture she dismissed this problem. It was quite possible that some of the women present had wood or stone workers for husbands who were earning rice by labor on the tea house. The physician was too courteous to criticize their source of income and had used this polite method of warning them all against future evil. She was of a certainty a learned woman and clever. Otherwise, how would she ever have discovered that these present demons were assuming the shape of mosquitoes?

Well it was a queer business, and she, herself, would have nothing to do with it. The idea of becoming a public benefactor was tempting, though — after having been for twelve years the unimportant second daughter of the Sung farmhouse. Ho-ming halted abruptly and rubbed her nose with the back of a hand. Suppose — suppose these demons decided to attack her own family! True they had no sickness as yet, but Wei Doctor had declared that none were safe. Equally true was it that hosts of mosquitoes were already swarming about house and yard. And she, the youngest under her roof, alone knew what to do. Ardor welled in her. Chinese history was rich in tales of daughters who saved their parents from ruin, and at



great risk to themselves. Her shoulders straightened dramatically: was she less than these? No! With a mantle of new dignity upon her she continued slowly to her own door.

In the days that followed, Ho-ming shared her course of action with no one. On too many occasions she had made herself the butt of family ridicule by imparting her ambitions prematurely; this time she would await unmistakable results. The richest battle ground proved to be a pile of fodder and refuse at the rear of the house, and each spare moment now found her there, hitting with violence in every direction and adding materially to the store of victims. A cracked bottle with a joint of sugar cane for stopper served as storage place for the dead, and when not in use, lay hidden skilfully beneath a pile of straw. All of this was simple enough; preserving secrecy was another matter altogether.

Under the spell of letting none escape, she sometimes forgot the presence of her family. One evening while holding a spark to the bowl of father's pipe, she jumped aside hastily and her empty hand clutched wildly at the air about her.

Father removed the pipe from his lips, blinked eyelids, then asked sternly, "Is this a new game you play, Me-me?"

Before Ho-ming could do more than change color, Grandmother interrupted, "Play it is not! She acts lately as if bewitched, jumping about as any boy, clapping her hands together, exchanging words with

herself. But what was to be expected when you would not let her mother bind this girl-child's feet? Did you think that with such freedom she would ever learn to observe the proprieties?"

Mother studied the flushed face with concern, then placing her hand on Ho-ming's forehead, asked, "Are you sick, Me-me? What hurts you?"

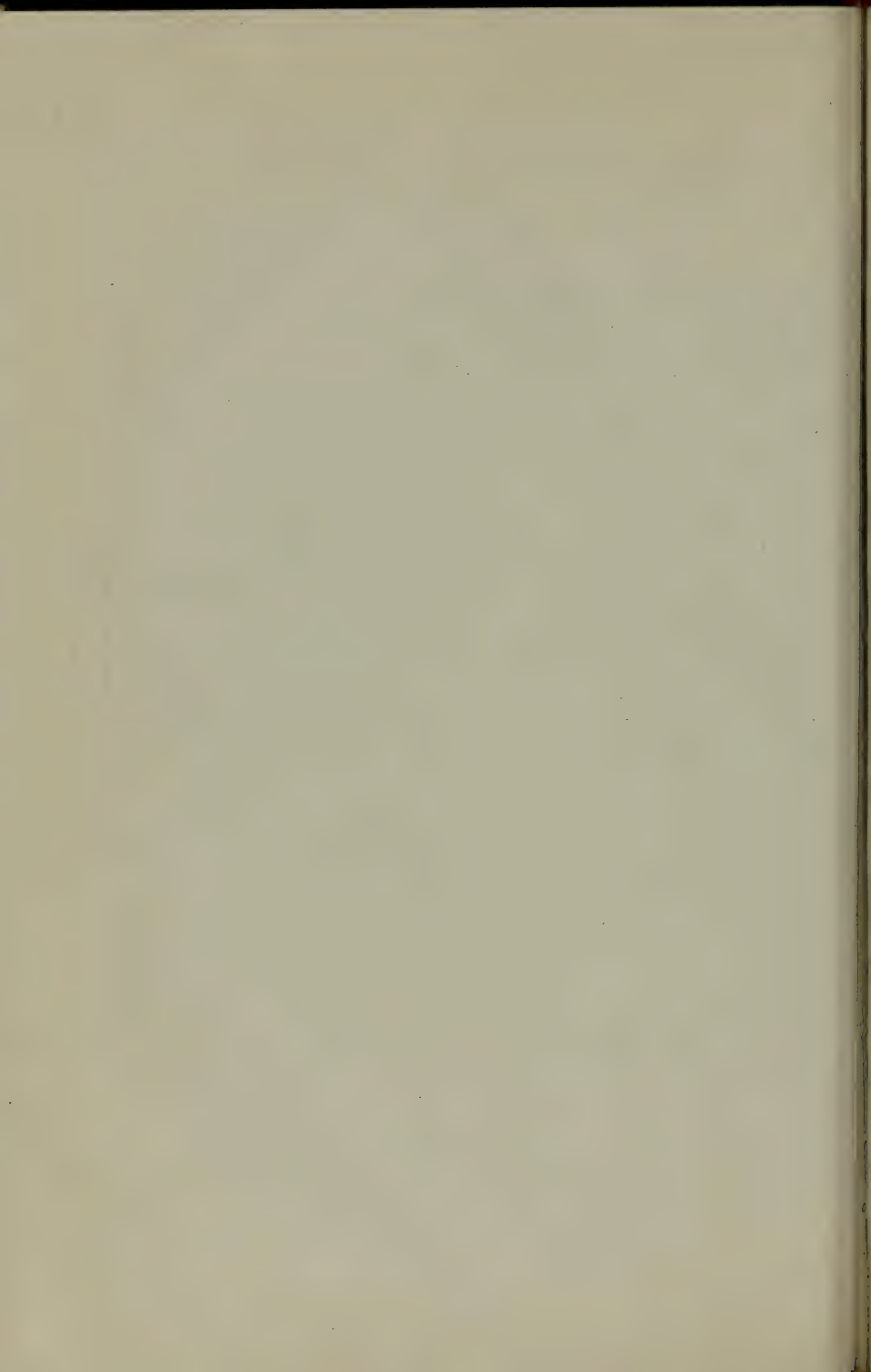
On the verge of responding to this sympathetic approach, her second daughter restrained the impulse and with a polite excuse evaded further questioning by going outside. She must be more careful or they would soon know as much as she did. And that her plan was working she felt surer daily. All of their neighbors were having trouble of some sort, trouble that was not limited to disease. In one house a litter of pigs died; in another two hens left their nests and ruined the settings of eggs. Three fields away a bean crop had been cut to pieces by worms. As for that evil the doctor had stressed, illness — two cases of smallpox and seven of the Shaking Disease were on this roadway alone. And if mosquito demons brought these greater misfortunes to pass, how simple to think they could bemuse hens and place worms in bean plants!

Ho-ming's own devils no longer rose in such clouds from the refuse pile. The bottle was now quite filled with remnants of legs and wings and the more recent victims had been placed in a segment of hollowed-out bamboo. One morning her brother, Yuen-san, returned from the field and caught her peering into the latter dark container.



"Is this a new game you play, Me-me?"





"What have you there, and why do you spend so much time at this spot lately?" he asked curiously as he reached out for the length of bamboo.

"And is that your affair?" Ho-ming retorted, even while she relinquished the treasure. Dismayed, she watched him look within the cylinder, turn it upside down and shake it. Ai-ya, now everyone would know! But Yuen-san saw nothing suspicious in the dust and dead insects which might be found in any dark hiding place. With a smile superior by one year of age, he returned the object and inquired sarcastically, "Would anyone but a silly girl waste time with such useless playthings?"

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For once in her life, Ho-ming had no ready reply. This had been too near discovery to be amusing. Moreover, those mosquitoes which she had worked hard to accumulate could not again be reclaimed. She wished it were possible to save her family without so much effort; had she dared to burn the trash pile, that would have been simpler. As for buying foreign oil, the doctor's other suggestion — were there money to do so (which there was not) that on the face of it was absurd. What farmer was so wealthy as to throw money into mud puddles? Nothing was left save to continue her original method even though she was already beginning to show the effects of its strain. Her nights were restless, and two or three times she had, half-awake, slapped at Mei-li for a dream-flitting mosquito.

Mei-li, usually patient, resented this treatment. "Truly, I believe it is as Grandmother said," she

complained; "you are bewitched. Often have you done strange things, but never were you like this. Look at the mark on my wrist where you struck me last night! Are we not sisters?" she continued querulously, "and have I, your elder, at any time hurt you?"

Ho-ming patted the bruise gently. "I did not mean to do so, Je-je," she pleaded in excuse, "I dreamed."

In the days that followed, the entire household watched her closely. Twice Mother, solicitous about health, forced her to drink a bitter brew of herbs. Grandmother's references to ill-bred girls grew sharper and more frequent. Confession seemed the only action possible to peace of mind. On the point of doing this, she overheard her parents contrasting in cautiously lowered voices their own present good fortune with the ills that afflicted their neighbors. Ho-ming longed to cry out, "I — I, your humble and unworthy second daughter, alone have brought this to pass!"

One evening Father returned from having a tool repaired at the ironsmith's to announce, "Today a mason's helper fell from the new building to the street. He saw a demon, or so he says, among the rafters. That the workman slept is easier to believe."

"Was he killed?" Yuen-san asked, eager for details.

"No. Men carried him to the dispensary close by. The woman doctor says that he will live."

"The woman doctor to attend a stonemason!" Grandmother exclaimed in horror. "Is there no longer any propriety in this place? Moreover, what does a woman know of such matters, save the plucking of herbs?"



"In Wuhu a woman manages the foreigners' Hall of Healing and, I have heard, has helped many," replied her son. "Though I, myself, for anything more important than a scratch, would not go to these outsiders, whether man or woman."

"Did many of his bones break?" Yuen-san persisted in a voice tinged slightly with disappointment at so tame an ending.

Ho-ming shivered — boys — ai-ya!

"I asked no questions," Father went on, "though I learned this much: the fellow workmen laid down their tools and the foreman has already sent to Wuhu for other artisans." He yawned broadly. "Tired to death am I! And such talk does not hoe beans," he added, then prepared for bed.

"Did I not say," his mother called after him, "did I not say the Feng-Shui would have vengeance?"

That many in the town held the same opinion was evident. Chen was still without an auspicious place for trade. The disgruntled elder had moved his family and most important possessions to a distant farm for a long visit. He alone of them remained at the scene and his days were spent sitting in his own gateway and eying moodily the progress of this building which had upset his whole system of living.

With the arrival of the newcomers from Wuhu, the local guilds showed their resentment in a hundred annoying ways. The former workers hung about the spot, getting in the way, surreptitiously picking up tools and laying them down where the present artisans

might least expect to find them; upsetting a bag of plaster or a bucket of paint and, what was harder than anything else for their successors to endure, jeering at the quality of the labor for the amused benefit of passers-by.

To a woodworker whose hammer had been misplaced there would come the taunt, "The monkey replaces a lid on a box and calls himself a carpenter." A plasterer smoothing the surface of a wall would redden under the shrill statement, "Old Lady Wang whose sight is bad daubs paint on her cheeks." And there was no redress. Only the foreman bit his inner lip and offered the tormented men more money for increased speed.

These Wuhu artisans were enjoying little their stay in the country town, and each day deducted from the period of completion was that much to be gained, but in their dealings with the head man they acknowledged none of this. "The work is to be done well, is it not so? How, then, can we hurry? Shall these rotten eggs who dwell here say we know nothing of our trades? Not so fast!" Only after they were promised an absurd additional payment did they show any signs of hastening the job.

By the end of the third moon the tea house was ready for business. A coolie, resplendent in a fresh coat bearing on its back the name characters of the new establishment, Tea House of Thousand Happinesses, strode from door to door and distributed small red invitations to the grand opening. There would be a play with visiting actors, during which tea and

sweetmeats would be served — all of this at no cost to those who were invited to attend.

Much to Lao-Po-Po's displeasure, her son decided to go and to take Yuen-san with him.

"Is it nothing to you," she stormed, "that we have thus far been protected from the evil influence of that place? Are you so foolish as to tempt fortune further?"

"Is it foolish," Father replied, "to accept good tea and sweetmeats, free of payment, in these days of high taxes and poor living?"

Grandmother went into her bedroom to sulk, and Ho-ming, wishing again that she were a boy to enjoy the privilege of such public appearances, stood on the threshold and enviously watched the two go down the street. As she did so, Wei Doctor rode up in a ricksha, alighted and entered the Tu farmhouse. The Tu girl had malaria. In the adjoining house the baby was ill with measles, far more to be feared by a Chinese than the Shaking or the Flowery Disease. And just opposite, the housewife had let her fire die out and every silkworm she possessed had perished.

Well, so far, Ho-ming told herself as she added another mosquito to the general carnage, her methods had been satisfactory. She waited motionless for a winged arrival to light on her wrist and then glanced about calculatingly. Gone were most of the farm workers to the tea house, leaving behind disgruntled womenfolk who shared Lao-Po-Po's fears of what might happen to the recipients of this entertainment. Within her own home Mother and Mei-li were busy, and the



road lay in rapidly quieting darkness. If she hurried, she might still see something of this affair for herself. In another moment she was on her way.

The main thoroughfare was alive with people. Shop fronts, usually closed at this hour, now spread bridges of golden light across the narrow street, and the tea house gleamed from all three stories. Through the broad openings she could see servants bustling about pouring from kettles to bowls, passing trays of sweetmeats, tossing steaming wet cloths to customers for use as napkins. Gay-colored banners and lanterns swung from ceilings, and a blind musician fiddled songs familiar to this section for centuries. Hugging the shadow of a house wall, Ho-ming stared with delight until Time's prodding finger warned her into action and she turned reluctantly homeward.

Suppose the family had missed her — what of that? Pondering this question, she neared her own door and then calamity, so often predicted by Lao-Po-Po, made its appearance. The air was filled with a rumbling noise, and the earth shuddered in vibration. Houses swayed, roof tiles danced crazily as if to some mysterious tune, and the new tea house, which until a moment ago had been so bright, now stood starkly outlined against the sky.

Men and women rushed from their homes, then, as the tremor subsided and had no successor, bedlam reigned. This temporary excitement was followed by a more purposeful activity in which each householder on the back road set about discovering what had happened

to his personal belongings. No one had been injured. Two or three chimneys were askew, the side wall of one dwelling had an inch-wide crack, and a number of roof tiles were scattered about. The chief casualties were broken pottery and dented kettles.

Ho-ming, whose brief terror at finding herself seated in the road had passed swiftly, joined Mother and Mei-li in examining their own home. Neither cracks nor loose tiles were in evidence, and inside the rooms were untouched by disturbance. She sucked in her breath — this was too hard to believe! That killing mosquito demons protected one from small evils taxed no one's imagination, but earthquake — ai-ya!

Father and Yuen-san returned from their pleasure-seeking more worried than disappointed. To find everything the same under their roof was a relief indeed. They had not even been served at the tea house when the shock occurred. Lamps had flared dangerously and servants had rushed to put out the lights. Havoc had been wrought with the perishable stock of pottery and porcelain. It was said that one hundred dollars in local currency would not cover the loss.

"That is good!" Lao-Po-Po told them spitefully, beginning a tirade that left her son warm and dispirited. "And had I not bought these charms from the priests, who knows what might have happened to this dwelling? Also, I failed not to remember daily the God of the Hearth. These precautions I alone observed. Boast I would not, but what else, I ask you, has saved us from evil?"

"My mosquitoes," Ho-ming interrupted, enthusiasm making her careless of Grandmother's easy resentment.

"Mosquitoes?" echoed the family.

"Mosquitoes!" she repeated firmly.

Father's harassed expression lightened and Yuen-san laughed aloud.

"Now I know she is bewitched!" announced Grandmother.

"They are demons that bring disease and death," Ho-ming went on; "the doctor at the dispensary said it. I heard her. There was no better way to save one's family and become a public benefactor than to kill mosquitoes. Since then many have I caught. In that time has any harm come to us? Have we been sick? Have our crops died or our fowls left their nests? As for tonight ——"

"And you believed all this?" Yuen-san chortled with delight.

"Not so fast!" broke in his father. "That mosquitoes bring illness may be several tenths true. Lu Gardener told me the foreigners teach this doctrine. Flies, also, are harmful, or so they think. But what these pests have to do with crops or earthquakes," he smiled broadly, "that, Me-me, is too much!"

To the surprise of all Grandmother rose in Ho-ming's defense. "You find many things too hard to believe, my son! As this girl-child says, no harm has come to us. The woman doctor is perhaps more clever than I thought. My mother used to tell of demons that took the forms of foxes and other animals. There was in



ancient days a lizard ——” the story broke off abruptly, “therefore, why not mosquitoes?” She studied her younger granddaughter as though for the first time. “You are not too stupid, are you?” Then receiving no reply, she muttered, “This matter will bear thinking about!” and moved to her sleeping quarters.

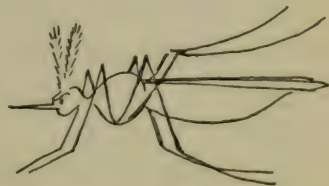
“So, you were not ill!” Mother sighed with relief. “Whether your mosquitoes were the cause or not, Me-me, we have been fortunate this spring. And to try to save your family was a worthy purpose!” she smiled lovingly and patted the sleek head.

“Those times you struck me, you thought I was a mosquito,” Mei-li said when they were finally in bed. “Since you believed them devils, were you not afraid to kill them?”

“Had I not killed mosquitoes before? What of them? Tomorrow I begin on flies, also,” was the reply.

“Ai-ya! Meanwhile, what of the many tasks to be done about this farm? These ideas of yours — never have they to do with work!”

“She thinks it was not work to kill all of those mosquitoes!” Ho-ming addressed the air. Then she turned again to her sister, “Had it not been for me, who can say whether this house, itself, would be here? Think!” she counseled sleepily, “think a little of that!”





### CHAPTER III

## HIS EXCELLENCY, CH'U YUAN, RESTS IN HONOR

**I**N the season's demand on each member of the household, Ho-ming found little opportunity for further campaigning against either flies or mosquitoes. Insects of other sorts were eating the leaves of vegetables, stripping stalks, cutting roots, and her nimble fingers sought them out for destruction.

The days crowded fast upon each other. Rains had been plentiful and the sun emptied an unfailing supply of golden warmth into the earth's brown lap. Beans swelled in their pods; grain ripened into tan; on the palms clumps of dates gradually took shape; and

bamboos, growing ten inches in a night, became tall, feathery fronds of swaying green. Farmers clutched at each moment and prayed that rain might not again fall in the period remaining until the first harvest festival. This celebration, the fifth day of the fifth moon, would of necessity put an end to labor for a number of hours. Each dawn before the last star had faded from the sky, the Sung farmhouse stirred into activity; dusk had deepened to darkness by the time all were free to partake of evening food. Their neighbors were as pressed for time as they, and there was little communication for any purpose.

In the house the spinning wheel and loom were silent; even Lao-Po-Po's usual mending lay neglected while the old lady sifted grain or watched the silkworms, now neither hungry nor restless as they diligently spun their own shrouds. Father was never without a hoe in his hand. Yuen-san pedaled at the water wheel to divide moisture evenly over the small terraced fields; carried fertilizer in buckets and ladled it freely about beans, peanuts, and sweet potatoes; led old Shui-niu to the nearest pond for the clumsy beast to bathe in the water that was almost as essential to his existence as air.

On one of these occasions when the midday sun had become too intense for work, Ho-ming, eager for some change from the busy routine of the farm, slipped off with her brother on this errand. Yuen-san rode astride Shui-niu's broad back and switched idly from side to side that the animal might keep to the narrow path



winding between the fields. Ho-ming followed, plucking and chewing a blade of grass, and wondered what her chances were for attending the Dragon-boat races on the feast days. If only Mother would go this year! Otherwise, Lao-Po-Po would manage that her second granddaughter did not mix with the throng gathered for the contest at the river bank.

Yuen-san broke in on these thoughts. "Look for crickets!" he ordered.

Ho-ming fixed her gaze on the dusty grass at her feet. After a little she bent down swiftly, then presented a small, struggling captive to her brother's attention. "This one — what of it?" she asked.

"Too slender — that would never make a fighter!"

Disappointed, the cricket catcher examined the shining dark-brown body. "To me he looks much like the old one you had last year," she remarked.

Yuen-san sniffed. "There is nothing girls do not think they know! Doubtless, since your knowledge is so great, you will soon be training one to fight!"

Under this sarcasm Ho-ming remained undisturbed, "That I will not. Even if I were a boy —" she paused, "I think the cricket likes little to be a prisoner in your gourd. To watch it fight is exciting; to listen when it cries to be free is sad."

"Can I believe my ears?" Yuen-san wished to know. "And if one does not keep them when caught, why spend heart to catch them? An idea, indeed! When Hun-deh brings his cricket to fight with mine, I say, 'Please wait a little — I go now to catch my warrior!'"

He laughed in derision. "A devout Buddhist you have become overnight. What of all those mosquitoes you killed? Had you no pity for them?"

By this time they had reached the pool. Yuen-san slid off Shui-niu and watched the beast submerge with others of its kind until only several pairs of nostrils showed above the surface of the water. Then he joined a group of boys whose task of waiting was the same as his. Ho-ming moved closer to where women knelt to wash clothes, and squatted down between the exposed roots of an ancient willow.

There was a steady slap-slap as short sticks flailed the wet garments spread on stones. Dirt ran in tiny black rivulets and mixed with the water of the pond. An ill-tempered dog lay with forepaws extended and growled snappishly at a family of ducks swimming just beyond its reach. Halfway around the circling edge a naked baby laughed with delight as his toes buried themselves in the mud. The small, plump body swung doubly over a bellyband, the ends of which were knotted securely in his grandmother's fingers. With her free hand the old woman sorted green vegetables then swished them, one by one, through the water in preparation for cooking.

The heat and the steady drone of the women's voices made Ho-ming drowsy. Half-awake she caught snatches of their conversation: rice and tea had both increased in price.

"And have you tried to buy thread lately?" one of them asked between beats of her stick.

"Ai — where the cotton grows, men fight a war — therefore ——!"

"In the next hsien (county) soldiers have looted three towns and several villages. Some general wishes money to pay his troops."

"Not soldiers, bandits," a goose-girl contradicted as she herded a half-dozen hissing charges close by; "my father heard it on the street. He who is called the Torturer leads them."

"Soldiers or bandits — the end is the same these days," offered another as she held a jacket to the light and eyed a threadbare spot with dismay. "It is just as I thought when I bought that material — it would be of little use, and I paid more than I did for the better grade six months earlier. Where my husband's next coat comes from, I do not know."

There was a brief silence. Guessing followed as to which young men would row in the races on the feast day. "Wu the grower of dates — his son is among the strongest," a young matron said as she leaned back and wiped perspiration from her face.

"And did you hear that Den's oldest girl is betrothed to him? A clever go-between! Her father must have promised a good dowry—she is lazy, and what a tongue!"

"Her mother-in-law has a tongue, also!" someone chuckled, but Ho-ming heard nothing more until Yuen-san's voice called. She rose, stretched, and, yawning broadly, followed him. In a few minutes she was as wide awake as ever. "Let us go home by the highway rather than by the fields," she begged.



"It is said that the Wu youth will row in the races," she told her brother as they ambled along at Shui-niu's waddling pace.

Yuen-san drew arm muscles taut. "I wish I were one of the crew!"

"When you are their age, you will be." His sister threw him an admiring glance. "Father says that you have now the strength of a man."

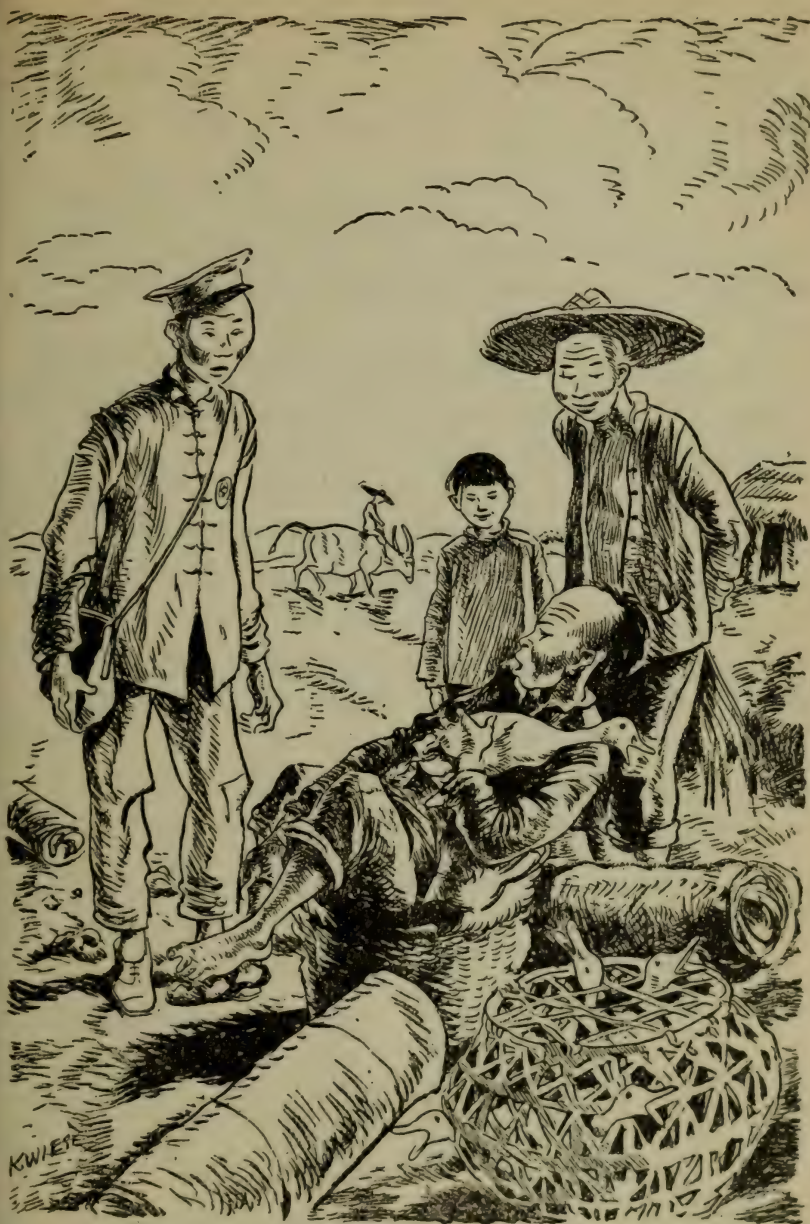
The boy's chest swelled, but he made no further reply, and for some time they walked, enjoying their own thoughts and the interest supplied by passing travelers. Back of them a faint, rumbling noise occurred, and they turned to see the Wuhu bus in the distance.

At the same time and from the opposite direction a foreign woman approached, her mind apparently little concerned with the scene about her. Suddenly her distraction was broken by the strident blast of the oncoming machine, and she looked up to discover that only a few yards separated her from a particularly ugly water buffalo. Panic seized her. A week earlier one of her associates had been tossed into a rice field by just such a brute. To cross the road in the path of the bus would be dangerous, but to confront this creature at closer quarters was unthinkable. For one second she stood poised in indecision, and then Shui-niu, frisky from his recent bath and with a long-standing antipathy for foreigners, made up her mind for her. The long neck stretched forward, the great curved horns lowered threateningly, and the stranger darted madly across the road.

To the enormous surprise of Yuen-san and Ho-ming, intent on the progress of the bus and unaware of the foreigner's existence, their beast of burden, with an agility remarkable in so massive a body, started in pursuit. Abruptly there was a clamor of grinding brakes, shrieking voices, and squawking fowls, and by the smallest of margins buffalo and car missed each other. When the machine slid finally to a halt fifty feet beyond, it left trailing on the highway three rolls of bedding, a basket of vegetables, a bamboo crate of ducks, and one irate passenger, victim of his own decision to ride with the loose baggage on top of the clumsy vehicle.

Both the foreigner and Shui-niu, with Yuen-san striving frantically to keep his balance on the latter, had arrived safely on the opposite side of the road. There the frightened woman sought hasty refuge within the nearest thatched hut and disappeared from view. Unable to locate his prey, Shui-niu now turned to the monster in the middle of the road, pawed the ground in challenge, and snorted angrily several times. To his disgust the bus showed no signs of fighting, and after a little the beast, insensible to the stout blows and bitter epithets his young master showered on him, began leisurely to crop the grass at his feet.

The chauffeur, so used to such accidents that he viewed each new one with weary indifference, now pulled himself from the narrow seat shared by a pyramid of four other travelers, alighted, and started back toward the scattered freight. On the way he halted



The driver arrived only to face a storm of abuse



to stare coldly at Yuen-san. "Since you were born blind and deaf, why does your family permit you to roam the highways?"

"It was not my fault, but this wretched beast's! And for a buffalo to chase a foreign devil — is that so unusual?" Yuen-san demanded, furious with embarrassment.

"Verily not!" a voice answered from inside the bus. "They like not the smell of the soap the barbarians use on their bodies."

With a sharp twist of the animal's horns, the boy stirred his mount into action, and together they jolted over the narrow path toward home. Ho-ming, still standing in the spot from which Shui-niu and his rider had taken their first sudden departure, began to enjoy the comedy Good Fortune had staged for her benefit.

The driver had by now arrived at the pile of débris only to face a storm of abuse from the load-bearer, erstwhile occupant of the roof, who sat where he had landed, wedged within the basket of vegetables and holding firmly to his bosom the form of one terrified duck. How the coolie had come by the fowl he, himself, had no idea, but he clung to it as to some long-lost treasure recently regained. Frightened by the unexpected aerial flight and angered by his present ridiculous position, which was evoking unrestrained merriment from the rapidly growing crowd, he became each moment more excited.

"Pig, and the son of generations of pigs!" he shouted at the chauffeur, "I pay good money for the

ticket on your devil's machine only to have you throw me off in this fashion. Those whose cart it is — can they find no men of sense that they hire you? The idiot in my village would know better than to treat patrons thus!" He spat in disgust.

"And did I coax that water cow on the road at that moment?" demanded the recipient of these insults. "Moreover, I warned you not to ride on the roof — I warned you ——"

"Good! And where then was I to sit, with no space inside? They sell tickets — these robbers! Wherefore no seats?"

"You are hard to please," a bystander suggested facetiously. "That vegetable basket — is it not comfortable?"

"Yes," came indignantly from within the bus, "and those vegetables are mine. Think you they are any the better for that clumsy one's weight? Since he must sit somewhere, why not on those rolls of bedding?"

"And was it my choice to sit on your worthless vegetables that were picked probably a half-moon ago and kept fresh with much sprinkling?" rejoined the coolie. Then turning his wrath again to the driver, he continued, "Hear me! You and your cart-owners will pay for this! My back is broken, my whole body bruised, my garments torn, my ——" rage seized him afresh — "where?" he screeched, noticing his bare left foot sticking upright above the basket, "where is that new straw sandal, worn for the first time this morning?"

The chauffeur, busily mending with bits of grass the crate in which three ducks still huddled, pointed with his chin to the missing footwear, and its owner, stirred for the first time into physical action, extricated himself from the jackknife position among the vegetables, and, clasping the slippery fowl to his bosom, recovered and adjusted the straw sandal with his toes.

In another moment his anger slipped from him like a discarded garment, for the driver, to the delight of the onlookers, had started after the two remaining ducks. These, having achieved the freedom of the roadside, were gathering provender from a ditch, but with the first move of their would-be captor in that direction, they waddled quacking away. Each moment in this game of hide-and-seek the crowd's jocularity increased; each moment the principal participant grew more unhappy, and it was not until he held most of the short tail feathers in his hands that the shorn fowls were finally secured. In this fun at the other man's expense, the load-bearer's personal grievance assumed less importance, and when the time came, he offered amiably enough to place the remaining fowl among the others in the crate.

Ho-ming, with eyes two crinkled slits of laughter, found her interest wandering to the machine itself—a cagelike arrangement of wire netting attached carelessly to an old-fashioned type of chassis. The three long wooden benches within were occupied by those passengers who had arrived early; between the feet of these and the mass of luggage, late comers crowded



every available inch of space. That each traveler experienced the height of physical discomfort, and that many were sick from the combined fetid odors and the rocking, springless motion, would have left Ho-ming unmoved even had she realized these conditions. To ride in this cart just once would be worth much, she told herself as she turned slowly toward home, but so long as Grandmother lived, there was small hope of such an opportunity. For the most part, the townspeople had learned to accept these vehicles as a matter of course, all save Lao-Po-Po's generation which continued to regard modern inventions as un-mixed evils.

"The busses bring trade to this town," Father would argue. "Look at the new tea house; it prospers in spite of talk against it."

"Ai, look at it!" Lao-Po-Po would agree much too readily. "What of the trouble it caused? These devil machines on the roads shaking the buffalo who holds the earth on his back; devil machines that fly above our heads; devil machines in the ships on the river stirring the water demon to fury! Is it any wonder men fight wars or that bandits increase in number? With no rest on land or sea or sky, can men expect to have peace? Before the foreigners came bringing these evils with them, was not the country quiet? 'Have we no food of our own that we must eat their red turnips?' " she quoted glibly.

With the approach of the Dragon-boat festival, Lao-Po-Po grew restless. "Three days only remain and as

yet there is no artemisia in this house," she complained.

"Surely the flower seller will come here today," comforted Mother, "then we can buy a sprig for our doorway."

"The plant gives better protection, if one spends heart to gather it."

Mother nodded, "This I know, but there is so much to do here on the farm that no one can be spared."

Ho-ming, squatting by a basket of roots, threw out a bad one and asked, "Why do we use artemisia and not something else?"

"That plant the farm woman was ordered to use," Mother answered. "Old One, what was the general's name?" she inquired of her mother-in-law.

Grandmother narrowed eyes and pursed lips as she searched memory.

Hearing no reply, Mei-li called from the sleeping room where she worked, "Huang Ch'ao."

"A scholar we have with us," commented Lao-Po-Po spitefully, provoked by her own inability to remember.

Slowly Mei-li came forward. "Little do I know, Wise One; Lu's girl read the tale in a book at the foreign school."

Ho-ming swung back on her heels. "What else did the book say?"

"In my day maids learned wisdom from their elders' lips, not from books," Grandmother sputtered in annoyance. She folded her mending, rose, reached for a walking stick, and hobbled down the road to join one of her contemporaries seated before a sunny house wall.

With grave expression Mother watched her go, then turned to Ho-ming, "The tongue is like a door knocker to be used on proper occasions," she admonished. "You could have asked your questions at another time."

Mei-li looked on ruefully. "I, also, should have waited before answering."

When the two girls were alone, Ho-ming demanded the rest of the story, and Mei-li began, "One day, the fifth of the fifth moon, this general, Huang Ch'ao, rode with his men over the countryside killing everyone they met. After a time they overtook a farm woman in flight with two small boys. Captured, the woman fell on her knees and begged that the older boy might be spared ——"

"Naturally," Ho-ming interrupted, "so that he could care for the ancestral tablets."

"Not true! The younger boy was her son; the older was her dead husband's nephew, an orphan she had sworn to protect with her life."

"And she asked pity for him and not for her own child?"

"What else? Did her promise mean nothing? The general listened — his heart was not all stone — then he plucked a sprig of artemisia from the roadside and held it out to the woman. 'Go!' he commanded; 'place this plant above the door of your home and tell all of your family to do likewise. When my soldiers see this sign on a house, no harm shall come to it.'



"The woman hurried home and when the soldiers came that way, every house in the district wore a spray of artemisia and all were saved. And from that time until today farm people have hung this shrub before their doors."

"Lao-Po-Po believes the plant keeps trouble from our roof even now, Je-je. Is Huang Ch'ao still likely to pass by?" Ho-ming asked critically.

"Of course not! Has he not been dead for many centuries?"

"Then why does Grandmother fear?"

Mei-li shrugged her shoulders. "And can I answer that? An old custom this is — more I do not know."

The feast day dawned with no fleck of cloud to mar the surface of the sky. All in the household except Grandmother planned to attend the contest at the river. There was a bustle of haste and activity, and afternoon had already arrived when Ho-ming, dressed before the others, stood waiting just outside the door.

A breeze cut its way through the unpleasant odors of the town and touched her nostrils with the scent of blossoms. Spanning the eaves above her head, a great hairy spider rested on gossamer; long strings of ants filed in every direction; a gray wall lizard appeared from nowhere and raced madly upward into the warmth and sunshine of late spring. Ho-ming's flesh prickled slightly; lizards, next to snakes and centipedes, were what she feared most. It was said that these small four-footed snakes, given a chance, would enter the ear and eat the brain.

The others now joined her. Father and Yuen-san led with the womenfolk filing along in turn. The streets were crowded with people going the same way, and men and boys exchanged gay greetings. Most doorways bore sprays of artemisia and strange paper effigies of the insects and small creatures that harass the farmer. On this day evil spirits were supposed to return to the earth in great numbers, and only by these symbols did the older generation believe demons could be frightened away.

People crowded the river bank. The opposite shore was thronged with those from the competing town, and the elders of each community stood on the arch of the old connecting bridge. Staked just beneath them were two long, narrow boats whose prows curved upward into the heads of dragons, and from whose sides fluttered colored banners. At close intervals within them were stationed rowers holding short, flat paddles, and for each of these crews were two leaders, one at the bow and one at the stern. In the hands of the first leader was a gong; the second held strings of fire-crackers; and upon the ability of these men to stir their rowers to effort would depend the results of the race.

The hot sun beat down on the jostling mobs lining the banks, and the air was tense with excitement. Sung Farmer forced a path through the mass of bodies before him, and the family came to a standstill on a small rise of ground not far from the water's edge. After a little, Father and Yuen-san moved forward to

mingle with a group of men and boys who were gathered about an old scholar, named Giao.

"Tell us once more, Honored and Wise One," someone called out, "the history of this day!"

"Ai, tell us of the poet! Of Ch'u Yuan, the faithful! Tell us!" the crowd echoed the cry.

Giao Hsien-Seng began in soft, even voice, and Ho-ming strained to listen, but she could catch no word of what he said. With one eye cautiously directed on Mother and Mei-li, who were engrossed in conversation with a neighbor, she pushed her way step by step nearer the circle of men. There, hidden from view by the ample width of a stout coolie woman, she heard Giao Teacher's tones swelling with the richness of his theme.

"And so, that honorable poet and able official, Ch'u Yuan, bowed himself out of the Son of Heaven's presence and went home. Within the quiet of his household, he shut himself away from the family and gave vent to grief. From his youth he had walked in the wisdom of the classics, striving always to live rightly. Two hundred years earlier the Great Sage, Confucius, had taught, 'The virtuous man is not governed by private affection or interest, but only regards the public good!' Ch'u Yuan could see no way in which he had failed to do this, placing, as he had, the people's needs and his emperor's welfare high above all else. And yet today, when his enemy, the prince, had accused him of treachery, the emperor had believed the false statement. There was no way to prove himself innocent. Men had



been hired to weave that tissue of lies; the same could be done again. How, he asked himself, was he to save from disgrace a name that for generations had known no smirch?

"Evening drew on. His family carried to him bowls of tempting food and steaming jasmine-scented tea. He motioned them away. Time passed unheeded. At last in the dark Hour of the Rat, he stepped into his garden of dwarfed trees and miniature landscapes—there where, in former days, poems had flowered so freely in his mind, and from that moment he was seen no more under his own roof. For several years he wandered desolate in strange places, until the Mi-lo River drew him gently to its sheltering bosom.

"When the people learned of his death, they were stirred, too late, to action. They knew the quality of the man and his record of faithful service. Had not Confucius, himself, in like circumstance been forced to remark, 'I have the fidelity of the dog and I am treated like one.' In boats they began the search for the body, but they found it not. Weary and sad, they returned to their homes and there prepared offerings of rice cakes to the departed poet's spirit. Once more the boats set out, each village racing that it might be the first to reach the spot where Ch'u Yuan had drowned. And in this fashion have we of the Middle Kingdom, for more than two thousand years, paid tribute to a man's fidelity." Giao Scholar's voice sank again to its usual even tone, "To be faithful," he repeated half to himself, "to be faithful is to be great."

Flushed of cheeks, Ho-ming rejoined the women. There were times, she thought with a faint discomfort, when this virtue of the dead poet's seemed less important to her than some other things. Today, for instance, in order to satisfy curiosity, she had slipped away secretly when her place was close to her mother's side. Very perplexing it was! Had she remained where she should, then her ears would not have heard this teaching which everyone among her elders would agree was for her good. Immediately this problem was forgotten in the deafening explosion of firecrackers. About the bridge the water churned with the motion of many paddles. The boats were off!

Down between the narrow banks rowed the contestants, leaders yelling, banners waving. For the first hundred yards they pulled prow to prow, their head men alternately beating gongs and calling out orders. A second hundred was passed; a third. The opponents from Kiang-beh, the town across the river, were a foot in the lead and the people on Ho-ming's bank leaned forward in suspense. On rushed the boats to the spot designated for the turn; the crews worked as one man under the frenzied efforts of those in command. At the turning point they swung about wildly and the two prows grazed. A second of adjustment and they were on the way back, with the men of Kiang-beh still in advance. Sweating and gasping, the rowers urged to fresh effort muscles quivering from exertion. Their leaders, now madly shrieking bundles of energy, grew wild as they neared the goal. Suddenly a Kiang-beh

man fell over his paddle, exhausted. At the same moment the Wu youth justified his selection with an unusual spurt of strength and the two boats were even. A few more strokes and Wu and his companions, attended by delighted yells from their community, passed over the goal a full length ahead of their competitors. For another year the race of the Dragon-boats was over.

While the crowds disbanded, there was much friendly bantering among the spectators. Father again led the way, and the others followed as closely as the jam of figures would permit them. Yuen-san caught sight of Hun-deh and, joining him, commenced a serious discussion of crickets. Of her family Ho-ming only lingered to watch the priests from the temple take charge of the two boats. These were lifted carefully up the bank and carried in state to the place of worship where they would remain sacredly preserved until their further use a year from this day. Turning, she stumbled over a root in the earth. To her surprise, a hand reached forward and held her steady — it was that of the Chinese woman, Wei Doctor. Ho-ming bowed her thanks.

"Do not speak of it, Me-me, it is hard for girls to stand in crowds like this, particularly if their feet are bound."

"But my feet are free, Honorable Doctor," Ho-ming replied proudly. "I am, however, very clumsy!" Her heart beat fast. Never had she held speech with so important a person. She would like — the excitement of the moment supplied her with the necessary



courage, and she continued, "Most Respected Physician, what you told me about mosquitoes saved my house from much trouble."

Wei Ih-Seng's eyes concentrated on the flushed eager face, "I do not understand, Me-me — have I talked with you before and do not remember? If so, you must pardon me."

"The Honored Healer makes no mistake — she does not know this miserable creature. Once in the foreign temple where many women gathered to learn about mosquitoes and the evils to come from the new tea house, I, also, was present. I listened carefully."

The doctor's eyelids blinked; momentarily she was becoming more confused. "The new tea house, Me-me?"

"Yes, Wei Ih-Seng was too polite to mention the building, but I understood. I went home, I killed many, many mosquitoes and the result" — she lifted a hand dramatically — "in my house no one was ill, none of our animals died, our young plants prospered and, what was most important, in the earthquake we suffered no loss, not even this much!" she finished, measuring the tip of her smallest finger.

For a second the older woman had an almost hysterical desire to laugh, but her expression remained grave. Such a mixture of hygiene and superstition was beyond words, but this girl facing her had, at least, contributed actively in the campaign against malaria. "I am glad you were fortunate, Me-me," she replied. Then, "What is your name and where do you live?"

Ho-ming told her promptly with a little bow. "Me-me!" Mother's voice called suddenly, "where are you?"

"I come," her daughter answered, then loath to turn away from this interesting moment, she assured the doctor, "When I find leisure, I will kill flies, also!"

As she started on, the physician stared after her. Something about this moment recalled her own childhood. "Come to see me, Me-me, at the drug shop," then with a twitch of her lips added, "when you find leisure."

Ho-ming swung delightedly about, bobbed a curtsy, and was swallowed up in the crowd. Excitement kept her in so much of a whirl that she hardly recognized Mei-li when the latter turned in the path near home to ask, "Why were you so slow in coming?"

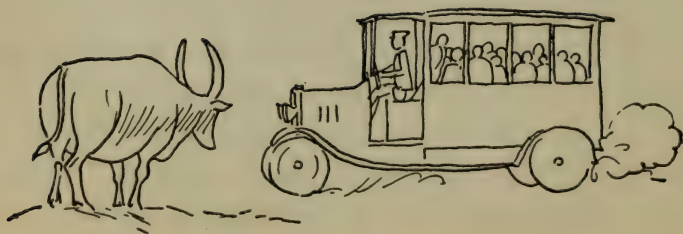
"I talked with Wei Doctor," then rolling the words on her tongue with pleasure, "she asked me to call at her shop some day when I have leisure."

"Ai-ya!" Mei-li breathed her amazement. "And what next? You will find leisure, no doubt," she remarked pointedly, "but if Grandmother hears — do you think she will let you go?"

"She will not hear. Only you know and you will not tell," her sister said with confidence.

No, Mei-li told herself, she would not tell. All of them save Lao-Po-Po protected this youngest member of the household against scoldings. She had a way with her. Aloud she commented, "We are as unlike as though we had been born in different provinces."

Ho-ming's eyes danced, "And that, Grandmother would say, was our good fortune. Could any family bear having two of me?" she asked with unusual insight. Then giggling at this small joke on herself, she took her shuttlecock from a pocket and began kicking it swiftly into space.







#### CHAPTER IV

“BUT WHETHER SOLDIERS OR BANDITS — IS  
THERE ANY DIFFERENCE?”

**D**URING the weeks that followed, “The Torturer,” whose activities in the neighboring hsien had caused so much distress, now began to widen his field of endeavor. Tales came through to the townspeople with increasing frequency of sacked and burning villages; of well-to-do merchants and farmers held for ransom; and to their more immediate despair, of the outlaw’s steady progress in their direction. Little there was in this rural section to hinder bandits on the line of march. Here no city walls rose gray and

forbidding to repel attack; instead the open fields and unprotected farms offered themselves invitingly as prey.

Already the community lay under a blanket of depression; women's work was attended by less chatter; men, to whom each moment of industry was important, now leaned on their tools and discussed this evil from which they could anticipate no escape. From time immemorial, in periods of social and political upheaval, farmers and small townsmen had paid most bitterly, and there was no redress.

In the Sung family a thread of fear wove itself into the pattern of daily living. Lao-Po-Po muttered constantly to herself, and at meals little badinage was exchanged. But regardless of the cloud that hung just above the horizon, the demands of farm life remained unaffected. "There is no help for it!" was Father's reply on all occasions, as he cultivated the soil with more than usual vigor. "Why waste time that these young plants need?"

Nevertheless, even he stopped long enough one morning to listen to the news which several of his neighbors gathered about him to relate. Three nights previous "The Torturer" had led his men quietly into the town nearest their own, had gone directly to the home of the foremost citizen, captured and bound the only son of the house, and then, dragging him to the main thoroughfare, had issued an ultimatum to the youth's father and to the rest of the community as well.

“Everything of value — money, jewels, clothing — bring them here!” he demanded. “When we have what we wish, then shall this youth go free.”

The terrified people murmured among themselves. None too popular was the wealthy citizen; much of his money had come from grinding down the poor, and now for the sake of his son were all in the town to be beggared? Noticing this hesitancy the robbers guessed the reason. “Listen a little, you cursed misers!” they roared, striking out savagely with the butts of their rifles, “either you hurry to bring what we ask or we kill all of your sons! Kill! Kill! Kill!”

Assisted by their unwelcome visitors, householders and shopkeepers, bitterly enough, opened chests and boxes, and the pile of treasure in the street grew rapidly. After a time the leader gave a signal for his men to collect these valuables and portion them into loads. As the marauders were ready to march, that citizen who, only an hour earlier had been rich, suggested timidly, “My son — now will you not free him?”

A cruel smile passed over “The Torturer’s” face. “When we come again — when we come again, you will not question but hurry to do our bidding. This will help you to remember,” he concluded, and with a swift movement ran his bayonet through the helpless youth’s body. Before the horrified spectators could do more than voice a protest, the outlaws had disappeared from sight.

Standing in the sunshine of the Sung field, farmers listened to this account and shivered. About them all



was peace and yet only a few villages separated their town from this horde.

"Had they no hoes with which to cleave the heads of these devils?" one of the young men asked indignantly. "And are we, too, to do nothing while they kill us? Let us think up a plan and not be surprised when they come!"

His elders smiled patiently. "Do you think no other place has tried to outwit them? Of what use are farm tools against foreign guns? Hundreds of outlaws there are, well-armed and trained to kill, like wild beasts."

"Then why not ask the government to help us?" persisted the first speaker.

"Ai-ya! when you have added a few years to your age, you may learn wisdom. Already the national government fights several tens of wars; is it likely to be interested in one small town?"

"Moreover, if soldiers come, then do we eat bitterness indeed," remarked another. "In return for protection troops always demand food and more. Protection!" his lips twisted dryly, "before the robbers arrive, the military will find excuse to leave, taking with them what the outlaws will consider their own rightful spoil. And for that we shall pay doubly."

"What then?" they asked themselves as each man returned to his particular piece of ground. "What then — ai! what then?" one townsman echoed after another. How many nights would pass before some of their own sons perished as had that other one? If

only the old official were still in the ya-men. He had been like a father to his people, but now he was gone to his ancestors, and a callow youth judged in his place — a youth appointed only because of political influence. In the old days men had sat long hours within those narrow stone cells that were Nanking's examination halls, squeezing from their brains the proof of eligibility to even the smallest of such appointments. Had not Confucius taught, the graybeards reminded a younger and unlistening generation, that those of high moral character and keen intelligence, alone, were fit to govern others?

But in the end the young official, having no ideal qualifications, prepared for the emergency in the only way he knew. Counting his insufficient personal guard with dismay, he lost no time appealing to the provincial government. And the governor, involved with the youth's father in smuggling contraband opium, could not easily refuse to send the force requested, with the order that in this instance no looting was to be done.

One afternoon the Wuhu bus driver brought word that several boatloads of soldiers were on the river and would arrive at sunset. For a second there was a lightening of tension, but for a second only — as the townspeople realized that in order to reach the ya-men, the newcomers must first march through the town.

“But they have been told, so it is said, not to loot,” the chauffeur comforted.

"What are orders, if soldiers are hungry? Were they ever known to pass by food supplies? And coming at nightfall — ai-ya!"

Yuen-san, who had run across the fields to hear the news, returned to work unwillingly. "Whether they come or not, these white vegetables shall have another hour or two of cultivation," his father insisted. "Soldiers and bandits are temporary evils; when crops are neglected, famine kills all!" He hoed silently for a few minutes, then went on, "How I wish I had sold that pair of ducks to Lin Farmer in the spring — silver I could have buried."

Yuen-san, consumed with desire to be elsewhere in the center of things, worked feverishly. After a little he suggested with shrewdness, "If they come at dusk, is it not good I lead the water-ox now to the pool?"

Sung Farmer shook sweat from face and hands, then smiled deprecatingly. "Troubled beyond reason you are for all but work here with the soil. However, I was once your age. Go and return early; remember that with each visit of soldiers, strong youths disappear!"

"They shall not see me," Yuen-san promised, clambering on Shui-niu's back and prodding the animal to a swift gait. No, he would take care not to cross the path of armed men, but talk with someone of their coming he must or perish of silence. Hurrying down the road in his direction appeared Hun-deh, his chum.



"Walk with me to the pond," Yuen-san called out.

"Not able to," came from the other boy as he hastened on, "I go to help at the house."

Yuen-san stared after him in disappointment, then continued to the pool. Meanwhile in his own home all was bustling confusion. Mei-li and Ho-ming collected the small objects of value — the choicest teakettle, an occasional bit of pottery, Mother's and Grandmother's few pieces of silver ornament. Lao-Po-Po wrapped her brass water pipe in rags and followed the others to the rear of the house. There in the makeshift room which housed the stock, the girls dug a pit, dropped the articles within, then replacing the earth, tamped it down and tossed loose straw above. Ho-ming eyed the finished work critically and commented, "Unless they dig like rats, these they will not find."

As she stepped back suddenly, a young pig ran squealing from under her feet. Mother raised troubled gaze, "So big have they grown, I do not know where to hide these creatures, yet if the soldiers see them ——"

"They will take them," finished her mother-in-law. "Naturally! When a lean tiger meets a fat goat, the goat provides the dinner." She sucked in her lips. "Between my bedboards and the floor there is space enough for these hogs and the curtains will help to conceal them. Take them there!"

Difficulty attended this task of persuading the old sow and her half-grown young to change beds for a night and by the time the animals were finally settled, their human guardians had become weary to the point

of exhaustion. "Now the fowls," Mother urged as she wiped perspiration from her forehead and hunted for a bamboo crate. When this was crowded with occupants, she hid the cage under the refuse and strips of matting that earlier in the season had supplied her younger daughter with mosquitoes. There remained two old hens, a young cock, and the pair of fat ducks. These were taken into the main room that attention might not be drawn to their hidden companions. "And if they seize them, there is no help for it!"

"But these ducks, they must not be seen, is it not so?" questioned Mei-li.

Ho-ming interrupted, "Will the soldiers really enter the house?"

Kuan-yin protect us!" came the fervent whisper, "but who can say?"

"Then what is the difference between soldiers and bandits?"

"Most soldiers are robbers; most robbers were once soldiers," Lao-Po-Po replied shortly. "The times I have lived through such affairs as this, always have I lost what much toil had earned. And whether outlaws or the military, I do not remember that one was better or worse than the other."

Sung Farmer's sudden appearance silenced the women. "Down the Great Road they come!" he said breathlessly as he hastened to close up the house. Sliding the last bar across the front door, he turned and asked, "Our son — where is he?"

"Why not with you?" his wife countered.

"He led the water-ox to the pool; to return there was time in plenty."

With this information a fresh anxiety added its burden to each mind. Slowly the bar was raised again. "I must find him," Father explained, opening the door. In haste he closed it. "Too late!" his lips muttered as the noise of marching feet swung past, "too late! To go forth now would but invite their greed within these walls."

From the street came the frightened cries of those who still remained outside the shelter of their dwellings, but in the dusky room all was quiet. Thieving from troops was hard to face; compared, however, with the possibility of Yuen-san's being pressed into military service, it was nothing. Ho-ming could hear her mother's shortened breath; Lao-Po-Po's tongue clicked nervously; Mei-li, still holding the ducks which Lin Farmer had desired in the spring, sobbed to herself. Tears rose to the younger girl's eyes, tears of anger, provoked equally by the thought of persecuting soldiers and by her brother's careless delay. "Why do you not hide our ducks?" she demanded, venting her irritability on Mei-li. "Do you wish those good-for-nothings to see them first if they enter?"

"And what good plan have you that you speak in this fashion?" Mei-li replied in smothered tones.

Challenged, Ho-ming moved toward a large, clay gong in a corner of the room. Several years earlier a crack in one side had caused this to be discarded and since then the receptacle had been used for rags and



oddments. One small trousered leg went over the side; in another second the figure was lost to view, then like a jack-in-the-box it bobbed up again. "Give them to me!" came the order.

Mei-li hesitated. "And if they cry out, what then?"

"Quack they dare not — my hands will hold their necks," she promised as the creatures were transferred to this strangely improvised nest and settled into enforced quiet.

Almost immediately from the rear of the house came the sound of voices in argument. This was followed by footsteps and a succession of sharp raps on the front door. Mei-li hid hastily behind the loom, and Grandmother established herself on her bed and drew the sleeping curtains.

Again the door resounded to fists. "Open! Open quickly!"

"Who is there and what do you wish?" Sung Farmer dared to ask.

"Do you waste our time with questions, Fool of a Countryman? Open before we break this door!"

"Father of our son, we but add a ruined door to other loss," his wife protested timidly.

The bar slid upwards and with flaring torch held aloft, three soldiers pushed within. The flame cut narrow, revealing paths across the darkness of the room, changing familiar household objects into grotesquely sinister shadows that seemed to link themselves treacherously with the dangers of the moment. Havoc reigned as the intruders peered about, upsetting

kettles, lifting lids, pulling objects from shelves only to discard all with dissatisfaction. The leader looked at the two hens and the cock who now roosted on the table edge blinking sleepily in the uncertain light. “This house is larger than the neighboring ones and yet there is nothing of use to be found in it!” he spat in disgust. “Curious, indeed — was I born yesterday not to be familiar with such tricks? Three scrawny fowls, and no more!” Turning he glared at the farmer, “Do you think we have never used our noses that we cannot recognize where hogs have been? That room at the rear stinks of them. Tell me where they are, you rotten egg!”

Rage drained the color from his victim’s face. If only his strong-muscled arms might reach out and choke this sneering devil where he stood. But to do so would bring ruin on them all; only through the bitterest experience had farmers learned self-control. With an effort he forced his twitching hands to remain inactive, but his head whirled and within his mouth a thin trickle of blood escaped between clenched teeth and lip.

The soldier, unaware of personal proximity to danger, grew more infuriated by this silent reception of his demand. Lifting the bayonet threateningly, he pointed it against the other’s breast and shouted, “Perhaps a taste of this will open your mouth!”

Mother cried out in terror and the two other searchers, who had until this taken no part in their companion’s proceedings, now warned, “Have a care! Do you forget orders?”

"Orders?" echoed the leader, "of what worth are they if we do not find our own food for tonight?" But even as he spoke, he turned away, sniffed the air and strode toward the sleeping quarters. There he tore Lao-Po-Po's curtains from her grasp and burst into harsh laughter. "Did I not say there were hogs?"

"What was your mother and your grandmother that you know no respect or courtesy?" her quick temper blazed out at him.

Angrily he pushed her aside, "Get out of my way, Old One, and guard your tongue!" With help from the other men, he jerked the animals from their hiding place. A heated discussion followed as to the best plan for transferring this live meat to the ya-men. Finally three of the young pigs were trussed. As they worked on the fourth, a gruff voice called through the door, "Hurry! hurry! we are the last; remember what happened when Tsu kept our captain waiting!"

"Come in and help us! Here is a good hog."

"I have more than I can carry," rejoined the voice as its owner passed on. Abruptly the three prizes were swung to loads; the uniformed figures hastened into the street, and the doorway of the Sung farmhouse was once more secured against the night.

Ho-ming, almost covered by rags, felt her heart thud less madly, lifted her head, sneezed, and then released her hold on the ducks. Surprisingly enough there was no reaction to this freedom. Recovering from one fright, she knew an even worse one as she climbed from the gong and lifted out the sleek, feathered bodies.



One was gasping curiously, but the other lay still. In a few minutes the first emitted a feeble quack; the second had made its last sound the would-be rescuer realized, as an oil wick flickered into light under Mother's trembling fingers. "Je-je, Je-je," the appeal wailed across the stricken quiet of the room, "Je-je, I have killed a duck!"

Mei-li rose from her cramped position and approached. "Dead it is," she whispered in dismay as she examined the lifeless fowl, then comforted generously, "At least the soldiers did not find them and this is still good to eat."

With a curious lack of interest, Mother noted the loss. Her glance took in the disordered room, the restless, grunting sow and its squealing half-bound pig. What mattered anything so long as her son was not under this roof? Then the lifetime habit of doing that which lay to hand prevailed, and stooping over the captive animal, she began to tug at its bonds.

Sung Farmer watched with somber expression. Three young hogs gone and with them the family's meat supply for the year. Four would have brought sufficient price in the market to permit one for home use. As it was, the anger, which had not yet died out in him, seethed afresh. A good farm his ancestors had handed down to him — a whole acre of rich soil. In his youth he had believed that if a man worked earlier and later than his neighbors, he was certain to prosper and to be able to add gradually to his son's inheritance. Instead, it was for this a farmer slaved

all of his life — that worthless vagabonds might help themselves to what they wished. One year cholera took the beasts; another, this! Crops were scorched by sun, rotted by storm, devoured by locusts or taxes, these last the worst of all. Of what use, of what use for a man to toil?

From all over the land came rumors of farmers turning bandit. And why not? Three hogs gone, three fowls, a pair of ducks ruined; household possessions scattered about; the old mother abused; he, himself, threatened by that worthless one — he, a farmer of generations of farmers, none of whom had ever become so low in the social scale as to join the military. The military — cold terror gripped him. Where was his son while he stood here and forgot all else in his rage? He stirred into action. "Secure the door! I go to seek the boy."

His bare feet made little sound in the peaceful, starlit street which had so short a time before echoed to those inseparable companions, Force and Misery. Faint lights glimmered through the cracks of closed houses and the murmur of indignant voices mingled with occasional sobs, telling once more that oft-repeated tale of exploited citizenry to which those in authority had long since ceased to listen. Sung Farmer cut across the fields toward the pool. For that spot had his son started in the afternoon; there, it was possible, hidden among the willows, the boy still remained.

Truly enough had Yuen-san, jogging along with the buffalo in the heat of the day, reached the pond, but once there he viewed its deserted banks unhappily.

Here was no one with whom to share his excitement and just as soon as the beast had had its bath, he would seek for a livelier spot. Even home would be better than this. If only his father did not like work so greatly! Many of the farmers had left their fields when the bus brought the news, and had not returned. He sighed. This very privilege of being a boy, which opened for him countless opportunities his sisters could not share, had today, in his capacity as field worker, debarred him from their chance at adventure. Here he squatted by the pool and waited while stupid old Shui-niu spread bubbles on the surface of the water; sat and, for the first time in his fourteen years of existence, actually envied his sisters.

Thoroughly disgruntled, he watched two elderly figures approach slowly, halt under the largest willow, then arrange themselves comfortably for conversation. At a glance he recognized the town letter writer and an old artist who had for years supplied the community with picturesque wall scrolls copied from the masters of antiquity. In his hand each gentleman carried a small cage. After a little the doors of these were opened and two feathered occupants, captives only by slender cords attached to their owners' wrists, hopped out, perched on fingers extended to receive them, stretched their wings delicately, one side, then another, and prepared to enjoy this temporary freedom.

Settled comfortably on gnarled willow roots, artist and letter writer discussed the present political conditions and the attendant decline of cultural pursuits.



"Times are not as they used to be," one remarked dolefully. "Men of ability find it difficult to earn enough for food. Giao Scholar tells me the parents of his students pay less in fees each year."

His companion made a hopeless gesture. "Twelve hundred years ago Li Tai Po wrote, 'Centuries have passed since we learned that soldiers were evil tools for men to use!'"

Yuen-san listened idly as their voices continued in low, desultory discussion of Li Po's and Tu Fu's poetry. The letter writer's bird was famous for its song — now let it sing before he must leave! Some day, perhaps, he would trap and train a bird. And what would Me-me say to that, she who did not like crickets held prisoners? Ai-ya! what was she doing at this minute? If excitement were about, that one would find it. Restlessness surged over him. "Come!" he commanded Shui-niu, but the beast, delighted with having the pond to itself, had no wish to leave. Before stronger methods could be used to enforce obedience from the animal, the letter writer's bird unexpectedly added its golden store to the late afternoon beauty of field and pool.

Lost to all but the music, Yuen-san sat still. As though touched by magic, this small scene lay in peace, far from fear of strife. Sunlight flickered through long sprays of willow and cast torn, delicate reflections on the surface of the water; turned Shui-niu's wet muzzle to polished bronze; transformed scholars and farm boy into sculptured figures from some ancient dynasty's art.

Yuen-san's throat knew an unaccustomed aching as the bird sang on. At home was an old flute; some of these notes he would try to remember and later imitate. After a time the melody died away into silence — and no one spoke. Finally, stirred by the moment to poetry, the two old gentlemen engaged in competitive verse making. This was something to interest any audience, and Yuen-san, to whose presence the participants seemed oblivious, listened eagerly. Not often did he have opportunity to associate with the literati, and unfamiliar as he was with their classical references, he could yet catch fragments for understanding. Of a truth, there were advantages to be gained from knowing books, he told himself; though he did not waste time as did Me-me foolishly fretting to study.

In the depths of his mind he became aware that something out of the ordinary was intruding on this quiet pleasure — a rumbling sound not connected with the scene about him. Startled, he looked up, then jumped to his feet. In the distance, climbing the river bank to the highway, a compact mass of men marched in step. The very thing against which his father had warned had happened, and here he was with Shui-niu, cut off completely from the way home. How could he have idled so much time? Perhaps the troops had arrived earlier than expected, but one glance at the sunset contradicted this idea. No, all of the fault was his own, and now what was he to do? By his carelessness he had endangered the beast as well as himself, and responsibility lay heavy on his shoulders.

Caging their pets, the two elders rose and started in dignified stroll down the road in the direction opposite that of the oncoming soldiers. The youth looked after them in puzzled frown, then with a sharp command to the buffalo, who now recognized urgency in his master's voice and obeyed promptly, Yuen-san followed in their steps. This way lay Wu's date orchard, and close to it was a cave used in rare moments of leisure for neighborhood play. Today it was certain to be deserted and would accordingly provide an excellent hiding place for him and his charge.

Within a few minutes they were safely sheltered. The water-ox sank to its knees and the boy threw himself down beside it, but security failed to set Yuen-san's mind at rest. The family, knowing nothing of his whereabouts, would suspect the worst; he, in turn, was ignorant of their fate. Dusk shaded swiftly into night, and with the increasing quiet of the fields, he could hear faint sounds of disturbance from the town. Trouble was evidently astir in spite of the chauffeur's word about looting, and he wondered anxiously what might be occurring under his own roof. Easy anger was proverbial with men who carried weapons, and his father resented bitterly any power that interfered with farming. Me-me, too, was saucy; she might —. He left the thought unfinished. Were he at home, he could be helping to protect his household in its danger.

Shui-niu twitched restlessly. "A double portion you shall have after a while," Yuen-san promised, stroking the leathery neck and scratching with grubby fingers



at the base of a horn. “Sweet grass from the roadside, but be patient! Here no soldier can find you!” His head sank on the broad back and, in time, sleep claimed a body that had started its chores at dawn.

Not long afterwards he roused. Shui-niu’s head was lifted inquiringly toward the entrance of the cave, and Yuen-san pulled himself out of the daze of strange surroundings, rubbed a cramped shoulder, and sat alert. Footsteps had caught his attention. At this hour who was coming here? Hardly a workman — then who else? Was it possible that soldiers had strayed thus far in search of provender, and after all the precaution, were he and Shui-niu to walk into their hands?

His ears strained to listen. The steps seemed to stumble close to the cave, then move away. Yuen-san held his breath. Now they were coming again toward him. A voice mumbled indistinctly. The buffalo, excited by a strange scent, had already shown an inclination to stand; in another moment (Kuan-yin save them!) the hiding place would be revealed.

Surprisingly the steps ceased; a weary sigh launched itself on the night air; there was a thud as of a body flung to the ground; and then to Yuen-san’s mingled relief and consternation, a smothered succession of sobs followed. He drew a long, free breath — here was no soldier, at least. And that this was reason for gratitude, he realized to the full in the next instant, as Shui-niu stretched out his neck and bellowed.

“Ai!” someone whispered in terror, “where did that come from?” When no further sound occurred, the

voice went on, "So homesick I am, I dreamed it. Ai-ya, I want my mother! my mother!" it repeated and lost the word in renewed grief.

Curiosity seized the youth in the cave. What an affair was this! He tiptoed to the entrance. There was no moon, and several minutes passed before he could distinguish the figure on the ground from the surrounding darkness. As he considered the next move, the shadow raised itself to a sitting posture and challenged, "Who are you?"

Frightened almost out of his wits Yuen-san strove to control his voice and answered as fiercely as possible, "Who are you? Tell me that! Who gave you permission to prow! in this grove?"

The newcomer seemed slightly intimidated by this, "No harm have I done your date trees. I am a traveler who has lost his way." Then with still less assurance, "Are you the landlord?"

"His night watchman!"

"I heard a water-ox, not a rattle," continued the other, half to himself.

"Stupid I was to call myself the watchman," Yuen-san admitted but not aloud. If only there were sufficient light to see this fellow's face; his voice sounded more like a boy's than a man's. For a second time he jumped under the suddenness of the stranger's remarks, "You — I do not believe you are the night watchman, your voice is ——"

Himself touched on the sore point of youthfulness, Yuen-san retorted in the gruffest tone he could

manage, "We shall see! we shall see!" and took a step forward.

The doubter waited for no further proof; immediately he was on his way with the recently created watchman at his heels. Yuen-san moved more swiftly and little time was required to overtake the stranger who, when brought to bay, thrust out a weapon savagely. His pursuer jumped aside and grasped the descending object with both hands. What a fool he had been to run after a soldier with a rifle; for this was undoubtedly one of the military, after all. And now the struggle was for life or death. Tugging wildly for possession, Yuen-san became gradually aware that his hand was holding bamboo, not steel — bamboo of a familiar shape. Enlightenment bolstered his strength. With an extra hard pull he found in his own hands just what he was beginning to suspect — a harmless carrying pole.

"How long," he demanded of his antagonist who leaned heavily against a tree, "has it been custom for load bearers to hide in strange groves at night?"

"Did I not tell you I lost my way?"

"And in search of it you left the road for the middle of the fields? A great method, indeed! Where do you come from?"

"The country beyond Wuhu."

"Wuhu — that far!" Yuen-san exclaimed, then stepped closer. "How old are you?"

"Fifteen and a little." But the stranger was tired of answering questions. "And you?" he inquired.



"About the same," Yuen-san replied coolly, unwilling to admit to a day less.

"I knew you were no watchman. Moreover, you sound even younger than that."

"So! I took this pole from you, did I not?"

"But for my leg, you could not have done so."

"Your leg? What is the matter with it?"

"Cut by one of those devils because I spilled his rice. He said he would teach me to be careful." His voice rose shrilly, "Never will I go back to them, never!"

"Go back where? To Wuhu?"

"To those soldiers, of course. Carry for them I will not, even if I die!"

Understanding swept over Yuen-san. "You came with them on the boat from Wuhu; then you ran away, is it not so?"

"But naturally, that is what I have been telling you. They gave me the full load to bear from the river to the ya-men. My leg hurt to death and I could not keep up on the march. When they reached the houses they wished to loot, I was forgotten. It was dusk. Suddenly I saw my chance to escape. I laid the load by the side of the highway and came here." He paused suddenly. "Who are you that I tell you so much?"

Yuen-san allayed suspicion.

"So you also hide from them," commented the youth from Wuhu. "Two of a kind are we. And I did not then dream that water-ox." He groaned, "Ai, but this leg aches and I am starved to death. Because I had wasted rice, they would let me eat none at midday."

"Come back to the cave," Yuen-san suggested, his thoughts whirling. The soldiers had looted after all. What of his own family? he asked himself miserably.

Sheltered, the stranger's first act was to fumble in his clothing and then strike a match into flame. "All soldiers use them," he admitted nonchalantly as his companion exclaimed over the possession of this foreign luxury. Pulling back a flapping trouser leg, he stared intently at the long angry cut. "It is worse, I think." The match flickered and died. "Do you know of any herb about here to heal it?" came the next question from the quiet darkness.

"Am I a druggist or an old woman?" Yuen-san returned; then, "What will you do now?"

"Had I food, I would go at dawn to the river. There I could offer to work my passage to Wuhu."

"Is it custom for boatmen to hire soldiers?"

"But I am no soldier!"

"Wearing that uniform you will find it hard to prove."

"What then can I do but starve? Since boatmen are not likely to help, will farmers give me food? Moreover, if I stay here, someone from the troops may find me."

"How long do they remain at the ya-men?"

"If your official feeds them well, who can say. They came, so I heard, to fight bandits." He grunted in derision. "On the boat they were already scared to death."

"Have you money?"

"Money — where would I get money?"

Yuen-san could supply no answer to this. "Stay here within the cave," he advised. "If Wu's workmen come this way, make no sound. I will try to find food for you and a salve for that wound. But do not expect me too soon — what may have happened under my roof I have yet to learn."

He led Shui-niu without and started on the animal's back toward home. No clamor from the town broke the stillness. This meant that the soldiers were settled in the ya-men. He would, nevertheless, halt on the outskirts and see for himself before proceeding. Near the pool he was startled by the sound of a voice calling his name. "Here I am, here I am," he answered eagerly as his father's form emerged from the shadows.

Sung Farmer drew a weary breath. Irritation increased with his feeling of relief. "Where have you been?" he demanded. "This night your mother and I have carried our hearts in our hands for you."

Yuen-san's face burned. He explained, skipping only that part of the story which had to do with the youth from Wuhu. This was not the time, good judgment warned him, to introduce the stranger into the conversation. Already his father was plunging into an account of what had happened to the household, and each succeeding statement grew in bitterness. As he listened to this heated invective, the boy wondered why he, himself, had become involved with anyone wearing the hated uniform, which seemed to have the power of changing good men into evil overnight.



As they neared the house, Sung Farmer's voice became calmer. "This time," he said, pausing before the door, "I will not punish you. But remember well this old saying, 'If you would succeed, you must pay attention to little things.'"

"In the future, I will not forget," his son promised soberly, but his head whirled. That fellow in the cave, what of him? A promise had been given to find food and medicine, and now! But throughout the joyful reception that greeted their entrance and the repeated exchange of experiences, the youth continued to make no mention of this new responsibility.





## CHAPTER V

### “HE WHO CATCHES A HEDGEHOG!”

THE next morning Yuen-san rose to the usual call, started toward the water-gong, reached for the dipper, then stood still as memory shocked him into full awakening. He rubbed sleepy eyes. Perhaps he had dreamed that affair in the cave. No, the stranger and his cut leg were real, and some plan must be worked out at once. But how? As yet no member of his family knew of the Wuhu boy's existence; in their present mood he would not dare to mention soldiers to his parents, to say nothing of asking help for one. Then where was he to find the food and salve he had promised to deliver? His friend,

Hun-deh, could keep a secret, but in this instance to what use? Hun-deh would be able to contribute nothing — his family was much poorer than Yuen-san's own.

Ho-ming broke in upon this meditation. "How long do you wish to use that dipper?"

Her brother turned slowly and studied her. Me-me, also, could hold her tongue when necessary and, even though a girl, she was cleverer than most boys he knew at achieving her purposes. With sudden inspiration he whispered, "Come outside!"

"What do you want?" she asked coolly when they had turned the corner of the house.

"A share of your great wisdom!"

She considered him severely. "This morning you do not make me laugh — not one little bit; last night I spent heart worrying about you and for no reason."

"So you wish they had captured me, is it not true?" her brother retorted with a grin. Then his expression sobered, "Now listen — this, I promise you, is not laugh talk."

When the tale was ended, Ho-ming sucked in her breath. "A business, indeed! Without money where do we get these things?"

"Was it for such questions that I told you?"

"What proof have you that he is no soldier?"

"Am I that stupid, to be fooled thus easily?"

"Since you are so sure, Great One, then even our parents must believe what you have to say."



Yuen-san smiled sheepishly at this sally. "At present our parents ——"

"Ai!" his sister interrupted, "at present they like soldiers little. I, also. And when you eat no pork or d——," she swallowed the word duck hastily, "this winter, neither will you think of the military with pleasure."

"He is no soldier," Yuen-san persisted stubbornly, "but a farm boy like me. Moreover, I promised to carry him food and medicine, I promised down to the ground, does that mean nothing?"

"A promise is a promise," Ho-ming grudgingly admitted.

Yuen-san watched her shifting expression and seized the moment. "Suppose the soldiers had taken me as they did this one — think a little!"

His sister's coolness melted under this appeal, but not without a final word. "In that case I would not have to worry over this stranger, at least." She went on half to herself, "Some rice you and I can do without. Leave it in your bowl and I will save it. How to heal the wound is the question."

"Lao-Po-Po has no ointment?"

"Drugs there are in her pigskin trunk, but whether for knife wounds, or how I am to get them, I do not know." Her eyes narrowed thoughtfully as she glanced at the groups of housewives near by exchanging accounts of the previous night's losses. From under each roof something ill-spared had gone, and in the conversation self-pity and sympathy for others intermingled.

"The Woman Doctor comes to Tu's in spite of what has happened," a young matron exclaimed, "fear she has none."

Ho-ming looked down the street in time to see Wei Ih-Seng step from her ricksha and enter a shabby hut.

"Who is sick there?" someone inquired.

"The woman," came in lowered tone. "Last night she loosed her temper on a soldier and he beat her. Today she is more dead than alive. I myself saw her. Cuts there are on her head and bruises everywhere. No money have they for the old druggist, so they invited the woman healer to come."

"When there is no silver, there is no choice," an old crone mumbled between toothless gums, "but as for me, I will die without such a one's help."

"She was good to my second son when neither druggist nor priest could help him; he still lives and I do not forget," defended another.

But Ho-ming was no longer listening. Cuts the Tu woman had. If Wei Doctor could heal one kind, why not another? Abruptly she turned to Yuen-san, "I have thought of a plan. At morning rice I will tell you."

"Why not now?" he asked, torn between doubt and admiration, but his sister, in response to a call from within, was already entering the house.

Yuen-san went about his chores, and Ho-ming at the first opportunity was again outside, this time sifting grain with a careless speed, certain to earn her a scolding if discovered. Her attention was centered on Tu's

hut in front of which a ricksha still waited for its passenger. Finally a familiar figure emerged and the runner stepped between the shafts, paused for the doctor to settle herself comfortably, then turned and started down the street.

At the Sung farmhouse a sieve was deposited without ceremony on the ground and a small, plump maid sped after the disappearing vehicle. Two housewives, who had not yet set to work, watched with amazement. "That maid her parents had better watch. The farmer spoils her as if she were a boy, and she acts like one. Do properly trained girl children run thus? And at her great age — ai-ya!"

Unaware of this discussion about herself, Ho-ming overtook the ricksha in the cross street and called out breathlessly, "Wei Ih-Seng! Wei Ih-Seng!"

The physician turned in surprise, motioned to the coolie to halt and, with dawning recognition, remarked, "So it is you, Me-me. Do you still kill mosquitoes?"

Ho-ming bowed. "And does one so important remember my wretched affairs? Is the Honorable Doctor well?"

"Well, thank you! All under your roof are the same?"

"All are well. Most unworthy are we of your thought!" These phrases came glibly enough, while she wondered how to start the real subject of the moment. Finally she plunged, "A great favor I would ask the Respected One."

"I listen, Small Sister."



"Does Wei Ih-Seng have a drug for a cut on the leg?"

"Assuredly, what kind of cut?"

Ho-ming's eyelids fluttered in bewilderment — how many kinds of cuts were there? She gestured broadly with a hand, "Oh, such a cut!"

"But is the cut a new one?" her elder persisted, controlling a smile, "did the soldiers make it?"

"Truly, yesterday morning."

The physician was puzzled. "The soldiers did not come until nightfall."

Yes, and a foolish mistake that had been, Ho-ming admitted — how was she to get this drug? Conscious that the ricksha runner was listening with interest to the conversation, she made a swift decision. Her eyes sought the older woman's face, then with a knowing glance toward the coolie, she murmured demurely, "My affair is woman's talk — for this pull-cart man to listen is not proper."

In high dudgeon the coolie sauntered several doors away and leaned against a house wall. Ho-ming stepped closer and in cautious whispers told Yuen-san's story.

"And your brother is very sure this youth is not a soldier?"

"Wei Ih-Seng can lay down her heart; my brother is not stupid like me."

Stupid! the physician repeated to herself with amusement, as she opened her medicine case. Then pouring liquids into two small phials, she directed,

"With the light medicine wash the cut, after that use the dark."

"I understand, Learned One! Generous, indeed, is this and I have no words to thank you."

"A small matter, Me-me! Now I must hurry." She beckoned to the runner.

"And Wei Ih-Seng will tell no one?"

"No one! If I can help you again, let me know."

Riding back to the dispensary, Wei Doctor smiled to herself. This girl-child and her schemes — she would doubtless do well at books, but most farmers' daughters knew little save work and marriage. She wondered if the child were betrothed; if not, few matchmakers would care to interest themselves in a maid with Ho-ming's freedom of action. Laughter rose suddenly to the physician's lips. How easily, with her talk of propriety, had the latter rid herself of the coolie's presence!

But thoughts of her young acquaintance and the amusement she had evoked disappeared swiftly when the drug shop was reached. There a small group of soldiers fingered the bottles on the neat shelves and demanded of the lone manservant the names of powders and liquids. Wisely enough the nurse was not to be seen. For a second Wei Ih-Seng was herself tempted to flee; then, in her calmest professional manner, she crossed the threshold and asked, "What do you wish to find?"

Their requests were answered with less difficulty than she had dared to hope. Satisfied, they wandered

into the streets and joined others of their kind. All day long in that end of the Great Street nearest the ya-men the uniformed figures strolled about. One establishment after another was forced to welcome them. From each shop desirable objects were selected and carried off without further ado; food stores and tea houses were kept busy serving the outsiders. And no citizen was so unwise as to demand recompense or to publish his complaint.

After several visits of this sort, the young woman physician looked at her diminishing supplies of iodine and quinine, and sighed. Drugs were expensive and she gave much to patients unable to pay. All of the great thinkers of the Middle Kingdom had taught that war was a curse to any people, and yet from one end of the land to the other men were engaged in killing each other. Here in this hard-working country town, whose inhabitants asked only for the chance to toil in peace, soldiers had once more in the past twenty-four hours added a heavy burden to lives already weighted down with hardship.

She shrugged her shoulders in the effort to shake off the feeling of depression. What did one gain by hating these soldiers? They, too, were victims of unscrupulous power; many of them had been forced into service against their will, and, associating with blood and plunder and greed, they soon found it easy to slip into evil ways. Thwarted in their natural desires of farming or craftsmanship, what was left to this ill-fed, ill-paid horde but to prey on others? Well,



she also could resort to using that one weapon which the defenseless had been forced to exercise always — ingenuity. As early as possible she would close her shop and removing the most valuable medicines from their containers, would refill the receptacles with cheaper, more plentiful substitutes.

At mealtime Yuen-san returned to the house, heard his sister's plan to cache the necessary articles between stones on a field path, and then waited impatiently through the afternoon for his father's permission to lead Shui-niu to the pool.

"I, myself, will go," Sung Farmer announced, "or, better, the beast can do without a bath."

"And what happens to that fellow?" Yuen-san asked himself. Aloud he ventured, "No soldier has been on these back roads today."

A heavy silence followed, then, "You may go," came from his father.

Hastily the boy started on his errand, halted on the way to collect Ho-ming's contributions, and switching Shui-niu past the watering place, continued toward Wu's date grove. Fortunately no workman was about as he dismounted, and entering the cave he was greeted by the sound of difficult breathing. "Awake, awake!" he urged, shaking the figure that lay in sleep on the floor.

The strange youth muttered, rolled over and opened weary, feverish eyes. "Let me alone," he begged.

"Here are the food and drugs I promised you," Yuen-san persisted, forcing the spout of a small kettle

between the other's lips. The liquid proved reviving and later the patient reached out of his own accord for the cold rice. The first greedy mouthful made him sick; the rest he ate less ravenously. Impatient of time the self-appointed nurse urged the application of the colorless drug regardless of the yell from the owner of the cut, "It kills me! It kills me!"

"Close your mouth! They can hear you in Wuhu. Now this brown medicine!"

This time the stranger twisted in pain, but he made no further outcry. When he spoke again, it was to say, "You are a true friend. Already my leg burns less than it did."

With a lordly gesture, Yuen-san dismissed the subject. "I go now. Tomorrow I return at this hour if the soldiers stay from this end of town — otherwise," he paused, "I shall, no doubt, think of another plan."

During the days that followed the Wuhu youth grew increasingly strong and increasingly hungry. Ho-ming's effort to satisfy this extra appetite was never-ending. As in the average Chinese household, food was too scarce to warrant waste of the smallest fragment, and now with the recent losses ever in her mind, Mother knitted her brows over the burden of stretching meager supplies through a longer period than usual. This proved difficult, indeed, for she was confronted by exceptional demands from her son and younger daughter. In the past these two had eaten more than the others, and at the present meals their constant appeals

for replenished bowls taxed to the utmost her ability at providing.

One evening after the household had retired, Sung Farmwife lingered in the central room to adjust a peg in the grass-cloth loom. On a stool in the shadows was a bowl half-filled with mien and sauce from the evening meal. Puzzled, she studied this evidence of waste and decided that Ho-ming or Yuen-san was to blame. Thrift was a lesson learned long ago by the elders in the family and Mei-li was, by nature, too good a housewife to be guilty of this. As for Yuen-san — had he needed to put down his bowl for any reason, he would first have stuffed the contents in his mouth. Me-me alone was forgetful, though for anything to interfere with the younger girl's interest in food was surprising, indeed. She set the bowl aside and in the morning accosted her daughter with it.

For a second Ho-ming stood overwhelmed by discovery; no single word of excuse could she find. Then to her relief, Mother continued, "Had you been as hungry as you said, you would have eaten this. Many faults you have, but one thing you must learn: 'Extravagance is an evil the gods do not forgive!' In the future be sure your stomach is empty before you ask for more!" With this warning, her parent turned to the loom, studied the section of cloth just woven, and commented, "This last grass made poor thread. Today find me some stronger."

In search of the grass, Ho-ming met Yuen-san at the edge of the bean field. "Truly I am weary of this



youth you help," she complained. "Mother found what I saved last night."

"Now she knows everything!" her brother accused.

"Certainly, certainly — suit yourself!" came the disdainful reply.

Yuen-san was immediately contrite. "I know you did not tell, but what then?"

"Nothing, except that today your important friend does not eat; also, after this you, yourself, will have to ask for more food."

"How can I?" the boy protested. "Already everyone looks at me when I hold out my bowl. And if I do not empty it, what will Mother think?"

"She will think that you, also, are wasteful," Homing told him calmly. "Moreover, one small question I ask you: whose affair is this starving stranger, yours or mine?"

A little later, however, her energies were once more bent on procuring additional food. To share her brother's interests gave her more pleasure than she would have admitted to him; there was within her as well a faint sympathy for one who had eaten but little yesterday, and who, unless she foraged successfully, would eat nothing today. By noon she still had no single item to her credit; then with an apparent interest in housework of itself remarkable, she caught up a broom and joined Mei-li in the sleeping room.

"Did Mother send you to help?" her sister asked.

"No, I came myself. This work must be done, is it not so?"

Mei-li blinked in amazement and Ho-ming smiled loftily. "Am I not almost thirteen years old? Age improves me," then concentrating studiously on the task in hand, she added, "Good it would be for you to give me some of that sesame seed candy you have been keeping for a special occasion."

"A special occasion this is," agreed the older girl with sarcasm, "but the candy I hold for the future."

The picture of industry sighed, "And I suppose you have no watermelon seeds in your box?"

"Always you receive an equal share at feasts — why do you never save any for later use?"

Ho-ming paused and considered this philosophically. "Truly, Je-je, I do not know. Each time I mean to do so, but when I think again, every piece has disappeared."

From a small box, Mei-li took a half-dozen of the seeds and extended them in her hand. "Here, these you may have; and be sure you do this work well, now that age improves you!"

Ho-ming grinned after her sister's back, then gazed longingly at what lay in her palm. To waste such delicacies on a stranger seemed tempting ill fortune, but since there was nothing else for that creature to eat, these must be sacrificed. With an air of martyrdom she put the broom into action, and when the task was finished, slipped out once more to the fields. These were full of ripe vegetables; most of them, however, could not be eaten raw even if she dared to pluck them. Her glance wandered to a patch of cucumbers, owned by



As Ho-ming pulled the cucumber loose, a magpie rose suddenly  
from close by



Lin Farmer. Close to the path trailed one of the largest, half of it yellow and holding a spot of decay, though not so great but that the vegetable would do much toward satisfying hunger. Well, she was no thief to steal neighbors' vegetables! But careless it was for their owner to leave a bad one on the vine — her father would never have let this remain among his. Rot spread; also, it robbed the good ones of strength. Of course, it might be Lin Farmer had not seen this, and in that case, he would doubtless be grateful for help.

All about farmers worked diligently, her father and brother among them; the Lin field alone was deserted for the moment. With a hasty glance, she stooped, pulled the cucumber loose, and with a forefinger dug out the decay. As she did so a magpie rose suddenly from close by and jeered its raucous comment. At once a clod of earth winged its way to the bird. "Because I pick one rotten cucumber, must I listen to you, nuisance that you are?" Ho-ming demanded. Ai-ya! this business of filling another's rice bowl — she might as well be the father of a family!

Two days later welcome news of "The Torturer's" death reached the community. Once too often had the former quarreled over the dominoes, and an enraged lieutenant's knife had killed the chief. His men had disbanded, and the townspeople went about with lightened hearts. This, their most immediate fear, had been removed and now no longer was there reason for the soldiers to remain at the ya-men. But the soldiers,

equally relieved that bandits were not to be faced, were in no great hurry to depart. Food was good here, and nothing was required of them but to enjoy the passing hours.

"It is said the young official has hinted freely that the governor needs their services elsewhere, but they refuse to understand," Sung Farmer told his family one night.

"'He who catches a hedgehog can neither hold it nor let it go without regret,' " Lao-Po-Po quoted.

"And a hedgehog we also have caught," Ho-ming reminded Yuen-san more than once in the days that followed.

The youth in the cave, now that his wound was almost healed, grew increasingly restless. Daily his first question to Yuen-san was, "Have the soldiers left the town?"

As often, Yuen-san returned, "Not yet." One morning he followed this with, "If they had, what would you do?"

"Go at once, of course."

"Your garments have not changed."

"In this great heat, I do not need the jacket; the trousers I can roll up."

"The color remains that of a uniform."

"You think that would be noticed?"

"Unless all you met had bad eyes."

"Then what can I do? Already you have spent too much heart on me — am I to trouble you still more for advice?"

"Your politeness exaggerates," Yuen-san assured, "no trouble have you been. But if you wish to reach home, other trousers you must have."

"From where? and when?" the Wuhu youth asked. He sighed, "While I stay here, I grow no fatter."

"Nor do I," his host reminded.

"Ai! No courtesy do I have, or I would not have said that," was the swift apology. "My stomach's fault it is, longing for my mother's food."

"I understand," comforted Yuen-san, then jogged back to the pool. At home he placed the new problem of trousers before Ho-ming, but for once her fertile brain could offer no solution. She was still at a loss the next morning when a voice hailed her as she stooped to salvage a scrap of printed matter from mire. "A good deed it is, Me-me, to save written wisdom," commended Wei Ih-Seng. Ho-ming smiled, smoothed out the fragment, and walking beside the ricksha asked, "What does this say, Honorable One?"

"Several sentences there are from some schoolboy's first reader." Swiftly she translated. "Would you like to read, Small Sister?"

"Truly, Respected Physician. But in my house —!" the sentence trailed away in a sigh.

Wei Doctor's expression kindled. "The soldiers depart tomorrow, I hear; your brother's friend will leave, also, is it not so?"

Ho-ming gestured hopelessly. "Would that he might! Trousers now we must find, that no one mistakes him for a soldier."



"I have blue cotton cloth if someone would make them," her companion offered generously; "under my roof, you know, there is no leisure for housewifely pursuits."

"And I — Lao-Po-Po says any blind beggar sews better. It may be she is right, for the needle is no favorite of mine. Moreover, Wei Ih-Seng has already given too much to help us — we could not accept a piece of new cloth, as well."

"Nothing have you received from me, Me-me; I am glad to share in your good work; if you can use the material, I shall bring it when I come this way tomorrow."

"At present in our household they make a new suit for my brother," Ho-ming announced thoughtfully. "Perhaps, it would not be too difficult ——"

"For a small sum the tailor might do this garment," suggested Wei Ih-Seng.

"And is the Honorable Physician to spend still more on this stranger?" came in horrified exclamation. "No, I will think up a plan!"

The next day the soldiers left the town, and shrines and temples which had been neglected for weeks now received evidences of gratitude for this release from oppression. Ho-ming accompanied Lao-Po-Po to their own small place of worship in the fields. In her hand she carried two sticks of incense and a bowl of cold rice topped with a bit of sweetened pork. Brushing aside the few charred ashes that remained from the last offering, she thought enviously that the food

before her might be used to excellent advantage elsewhere. As she leaned over, a thimble fell from her clothing and rolled on the ground.

Grandmother's dim eyes caught the flash of metal in the sun and she asked, "What is that?"

Ho-ming explained. Her elder stared in surprise. Yesterday she had seen this one playing with thread and needle; today she carried a thimble in her jacket — Me-me, who never used such things when she could avoid them. What mischief was this girl-child planning now? Sewing tools, common sense reminded, achieved only what was useful, and it was possible her second granddaughter was becoming a woman at last.

Ho-ming fully aware of this scrutiny, went about the business of the shrine and was relieved that Grandmother asked no further questions. Bad enough was this affair of making the garment without the added difficulty of detection. At the first opportunity after the cloth was put in her hands, Yuen-san guarded while his sister measured his new trousers against the stretch of blue cotton. Hardly had she dared to cut the material — only her brother's whispered command, "Hurry a little!" spurred her to do so. When it was done, she looked first at the bamboo-wrapped handles of the scissors in her fingers, then at the results, and experienced a sinking feeling. These jagged pieces resembled little the neat portions of Yuen-san's own garment. But cut they were, and now the problem was to sew them together again.

Each day she worked at the task, carrying it carefully folded with the necessary tools inside her thin summer jacket. In the heat of the seventh moon, the cloth was a constant source of discomfort, but nowhere else could she hide it with safety. On her body it need miss no moment of stolen industry, and though the goods was often damp with perspiration which might have proved a serious annoyance to a good seamstress, this condition made small difference to Ho-ming. She could imagine no circumstances that would change sewing to a pleasant occupation.

Why, she asked herself, after an unusually painful struggle to fit two sections, why did she always have to spend so much heart on her interests? She recalled wearily the weeks of catching mosquitoes; indeed, some of her earlier pursuits had cost even more strength; and now, here she was, the only girl of her age on this street not accomplished with the needle — attempting work at which skilful Mei-li would have hesitated.

One morning Ho-ming called Yuen-san to the rear of the house. “Look!” she whispered, “is this good or not?”

Her brother examined the roughly joined trousers.

“Not finished are they!” his sister hastened to explain, “much more must I do.”

“Are all of the pieces in it?”

“All but a few; two or three small ones remain. For them I could find no use.” She fished them from



their hiding place. "Perhaps you know where they belong."

Doubtfully Yuen-san considered the bits of cloth. "What of the back?" He turned about, "These I have on, how are they made?"

"So that is the reason I could not make those larger pieces fit without stretching! Many stitches have I used to no purpose." She folded the sewing and hid it once more. Unexpected humor twitched at her lips. "By the time these are completed, your Wuhu youth may have become a man."

When the trousers were finally delivered, their recipient breathed no complaint about appearance; he was too happy over the approaching freedom. "This very night," he said, "I go at the Hour of the Tiger to the river bank and ask the first boatman for work to Wuhu. And not too soon is it! Yesterday for the second time a workman looked into this cave. I made no sound. He thought I was a spirit, screeched and ran away. But the next one may be more daring — then I wish to be gone." He smiled in anticipation. "Ai, how glad my parents will be to have me return! A friend above value you have been, and I shall not forget."

"Nothing, nothing have I done," Yuen-san contradicted.

"Please do not speak so politely. I know what I know. And if ever you go to Wuhu, ask at Den's silk shop on the Great Street the way to Soo Farmer's home."

"That I promise," Yuen-san assured gravely as though trips to other cities were everyday occurrences in life, and with a husky exchange of courtesies they parted.

Later in the week a youth from the group gathered at the pool called out to his companions, "Yesterday a workman at the date grove found a soldier's uniform."

"Where was the soldier?" Hun-deh wished to know.

"How do I know? Also, it is said two different laborers swear they saw a soldier in that cave. At the time, each was scared to death and said nothing to anyone."

"And why should he leave his uniform?"

"Why should he be there at all? Perhaps, Yuen-san can tell us. Many times lately has he gone in that direction."

The latter used bare toes to pull a stone from the mud, then poked about for a crayfish which was not forthcoming. "Certainly," he agreed, his attention centered on the bubbling hole, "I had business there with the captain of the troops; he offered me the position next his, if I would join them. I told him I might consider that some other time!" He gestured grandly, and the boys laughed. Hun-deh, alone, remained grave, and his friend was touched with compunction. The first time they were by themselves, he would share this secret. As for these others, let them continue to guess. The Wuhu youth was, no doubt, safe at home and for that Yuen-san devoutly thanked Good Fortune.

Weeks passed, and life revolved once more about the familiar problems of weather and pests. Daily the heat increased; clouds lay heavy and windless above the sweating myriads of workers; and disease stalked on every road. Wei Ih-Seng was taxed far beyond her strength as typhus and typhoid claimed their usual quota. At night she returned to the small dispensary exhausted; the young nurse, with as hard a day behind her, knew but one desire — to crawl under the mosquito net and fall asleep.

Even in less trying periods these two had little save work in common, and the young doctor felt on such evenings an almost unbearable desire for the cool corridors of her medical school. Wu Nurse was strong and tireless, but she could do only what she was told. Science lured her not at all; her interests were limited to the routine of the dispensary and the family life of the small paper shop which was her home. And what the physician needed most of all was someone with whom to discuss cases and treatments.

Well, she consoled herself, there were other districts much worse than this; her influence in the community was growing steadily; and from the teachers in the small foreign school, as well as in a better class household or two, she received the intellectual companionship as essential to her as food. An idea grew in her mind. She would have the school principal suggest some one of her students for possible medical training and she, herself, would further the education.



Catching up the mail which had lain on her desk all day, she opened an unstamped envelope and drew out four dollars. Some well-to-do patient's account, she supposed, then read the attached letter. "Who brought this?" she asked the servant who came in response to her call.

"A passenger from the Wuhu bus. He asked many questions before he would leave the letter and package."

"Package?"

"That by your right hand, Mistress. And will you eat now?"

"Tea and a mi-bao!" As he left the room, she turned again to the letter. It came from one named Soo, a farmer beyond Wuhu. After the ceremonious opening sentences, the contents stated that the son of the house had, almost two moons earlier, been conscripted by soldiers, but later had escaped and found refuge in a cave. "There he was fed by a farm youth named Sung; and by the Respected Healer, Wei Ih-Seng, he was healed of a cut and provided with a garment for travel. Poor and without honor is our house, and weighted down with the burden of gratitude for such Heaven-sent kindness and generosity. Nothing have we that can repay, even in the smallest way, what we have received, but we beg that the Honorable Physician will accept this pair of miserable wall scrolls for her use. If we may know the cost of drugs and cotton cloth, it shall be sent the next time a friend travels from Wuhu by the foreign machine. The four dollars, if the Great

One will again help us, we wish the youth, named Sung, to have for his own."

With a lessening of weariness, the reader turned to the scrolls and carefully unwrapped and studied them, her pleasure mingled with dismay. Good they were, the drawings delicately executed on the silk background, but unless this farmer was more fortunate than the average, his family would go without tea and meat for a long time in order to pay for them. As for the four dollars — to Yuen-san it would be a fortune; indeed, it must have seemed that to the donor. She smiled understandingly: how like one of these countrymen to feel obligated forever for a favor!

A little later with mind and body refreshed, she stepped into her ricksha and started for the Sung farmhouse. There neither Me-me nor her brother was outside and for a moment she hesitated. Her promise had been given not to divulge the secret, and yet four dollars were four dollars. So much money in the boy's possession would undoubtedly lead to questions from his companions and in turn his elders. Wiser it would be for her to care for the complication now. She rapped on the door, was admitted with many bows by Mei-li, then after an exchange of courtesies found herself alone with the womenfolk.

Almost at once she explained the reason for the visit. At the first mention of soldier, Yuen-san, standing with his father just outside the open door, straightened in fear. Within the room Ho-ming stared with dilated eyes at this guest whom she had trusted

and who was now betraying that confidence. But as the story went on, her emotions changed. "Through your son's goodness of heart, fortune has come to this household," the physician ended. "The strange youth's father, also a farmer, sends this gift of four dollars in gratitude."

So the hedgehog had not proved so bad a pet after all! This money would go far toward making up for the loss of pigs and duck. Their guest now rose, smiled warmly at Ho-ming, then seized by a sudden impulse, asked, "Does no one among these bright children do books?"

"No one — there is no help for it!" Mother admitted with regret.

"What with taxes and soldiers and all of the evils in this land, how can farmers do more than to feed and clothe their young?" Lao-Po-Po questioned. "This family has only one son; he is needed in the field."

"But what of these daughters?" Wei Doctor suggested respectfully.

"Daughters?" Lao-Po-Po looked puzzled. "What custom is it for girls to study when boys may not?"

"Today, Old Mother, many girls are students; they earn money and thereby help their parents."

"Does such nonsense help them to get good husbands?" Grandmother puffed at her waterpipe. "But this talk has no meaning under this roof," she pointed her chin toward Mei-li, "already a marriage has been arranged for that one."



Ho-ming's heart missed a beat as the physician persisted, "This younger girl, is she also betrothed?"

Lao-Po-Po stuck the pipe again in her mouth. No, for that wild one no contract had been made, but why tell this strange woman? To her angry amazement her son who had been listening with interest now stepped over the sill and, bowing, said, "Had I money, that maid should do books as the gardener's girl across the road."

Wei Ih-Seng continued looking at Mother, but her speech was meant for Sung Farmer's ears. "Suppose a way were found — could you spare her?"

Grandmother laughed harshly, "Small use is that one about the house, but why she must study when her brother may not, I do not understand, My Son."

"Broad is your wisdom! This, however, I know: the boy farms well and is satisfied. When I was his age, I wished to study characters that I might read and write them. Twice before my marriage I spent precious silver for those two books on the shelf; long ago was that — still I do not know what they say." He paused as though reviewing the unsatisfied longings of years while they marched through memory, then finished abruptly, "That girl-child is like me."

"If you are willing, I will arrange for her to study at the foreign school in the ninth moon," offered the physician.

"What is the cost?"

"That is of no importance. I ——"

"And how do we repay the Respected Healer?"

"Me-me, herself, can do that. If she is diligent and learns fast, many things are there at the shop to do."

"Too much nonsense do they teach in the foreign school," Lao-Po-Po stormed after the guest had departed. "Moreover, the drug shop — is that any place for a proper girl to be?" But no one listened.

Yuen-san was now giving a detailed account of his adventure with the strange boy.

"That night I sought you — it was then, is it not so?" Sung Farmer inquired. Receiving the expected answer, he added, "Is it filial to act in this fashion?"

His son wriggled in discomfort, "No, Respected Father, but your heart was hot about soldiers, and this youth wore a uniform like the others."

Mother fingered the four dollars and smiled in wry amusement, "Now I understand why their appetites seemed never satisfied. The doctor mentioned drugs and cloth; who made the garment, the tailor?"

"Me-me."

"Me-me?" chorused the others. "Me-me could not make trousers; even one seam, she ——"

Ho-ming who had stood in a daze since the doctor's departure now awakened to their discussion of herself. "Make them I did, and the Soo youth wore them."

"But they looked like no garment I had ever seen," Yuen-san could not resist teasing.

"Ai-ya! and will the Soo boy's family think all other needlework done under this roof is like yours?" Mei-li exclaimed in horrified tone.

Lao-Po-Po shook her head. What next would this one do? Making clothes for a strange youth! That Ho-ming had never seen the wearer mattered not at all where the old woman's ideas of propriety were concerned. Such a reputation would ruin the maid's chances for a good marriage. After all, it might be wise to let her study. She, for one, would have no further word about the matter; then if disgrace came, people could not say the girl's grandmother was to blame.

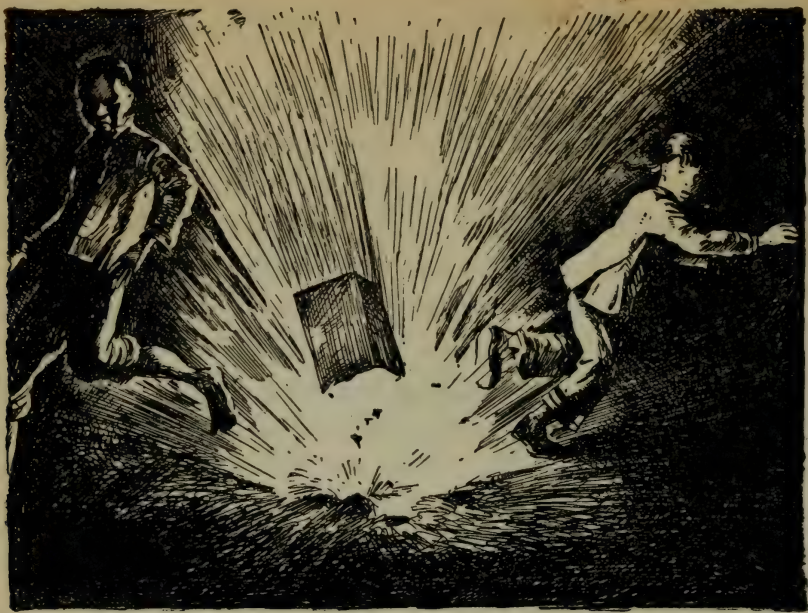
On the way to rest, Sung Farmer paused to study this object of concern. "It may be you soon become a scholar, Small Sister," he teased affectionately. His daughter replied with a warm glance of understanding, then slipped off to bed. There the tears she could no longer control welled through closed eyelids. Too much it was to believe, this evening's talk of her going to school. Only in the ancient tales did wishes come true thus easily. Could she have dreamed? No, Wei Doctor's appearance and the four dollars were real enough. It was to be arranged that she, Sung Ho-ming, would in the ninth month enter the foreign school. She would handle books, become familiar with their contents, and some day she might be great like the woman physician. Why was Wei Doctor doing so much for an ignorant farm girl?

"The study of books excels all other pursuits." The familiar saying rolled on her tongue. She would



work hard, and her father should not regret his goodness. So he, too, had longed to read when he was young. Perhaps, he still did; perhaps that was why he labored even harder than the other farmers at the soil. Had it not been for discontent, would she, herself, have become involved so often in questionable enterprises? Swiftly her mind bridged the gap to adult thinking, and without warning childhood slipped from her like a cast-off robe. The old Me-me was gone forever.





## CHAPTER VI

### “TO BE FOND OF LEARNING IS TO BE NEAR TO KNOWLEDGE”

MY hedgehog was not all spines, is it not so?” Yuen-san challenged the next morning. “Had I not caught it, there would have been no four dollars — ai-ya, but the Soo family must be rich! And but for the four dollars, would the woman doctor have come here and talked of your doing books?”

“True, true!” Ho-ming acknowledged, “your hedgehog was the king of all hedgehogs. However, my fingers still bear the needle’s scars and my stomach went as empty as yours — that much do I ask you to remember.” Suddenly she added with frankness, “You, not I, should do books, Go-go.”

"To be a scholar would be pleasant, perhaps," considered her brother, "though who would help Father work with the soil? No, a wealthy farmer I shall be that I may eat meat and vegetables each meal. In winter I shall wear a mulberry satin robe lined with sheep's wool, and in summer a gown of pongee. Often will I go to the tea house to talk with friends, and some time I may visit Young Soq on his farm near Wuhu."

"You have been too much in the sun," his companion giggled; "who ever heard of a farmer with silver to waste?"

For the rest of the summer Ho-ming moved about in a world of unreality. Regular household chores, though they received more care than usual at her hands, claimed few of her thoughts. In sewing, alone, she developed a new interest. Cotton cloth had been purchased, and from it a jacket and trousers were cut. Unbleached muslin socks and black sateen shoes completed her outfit. Annually at the New Year season each member of the family received similarly replenished wardrobes; these were renewed, one by one, at other times in the calendar as wear and tear caused the old garments to be discarded. This unusual affluence in the summer was beyond Ho-ming's experience, and a sense of pride urged her to help in making the clothes. With misgiving Mother turned over part of the work to this surprisingly diligent second daughter, and the latter strove to meet approval. For the first time under her fingers seams became straight, even lines, and the stitches on cloth shoe soles assumed a neat pattern



about which Mei-li exclaimed generously, "I could not have done better."

Later the older girl teased, "Truly there is no limit to what you may become since just the thought of studying changes you into a good seamstress."

"'Persevering industry overcomes obstacles,'" quoted Ho-ming complacently.

"And 'He who boasts may have trouble making his words good.'"

"Yes," came the unexpected agreement, "at books I may be very stupid."

"Perhaps not! Lu's girl is my friend," Mei-li comforted, "but if she can learn, you can also, though I, myself, would be terrified of a brush-pen and a slab of ink."

Her sister smiled. Too long had she lived with the fear of never learning to read and write to be afraid now of lessons. Twice since that first memorable evening had Wei Ih-Seng called to explain that satisfactory arrangements had been made at the school. All but Lao-Po-Po looked on with approbation. Determined to have no connection with this affair, the older woman, nevertheless, criticized freely the expenditure for clothes. "Many important uses there are for this money you throw away," she objected; "what of the future and my grandson's wedding feast? And have you already found the older girl's dowry, that you no longer save?"

For once her daughter-in-law dared to assert herself, "This girl-child, also, has the surname, Sung. Is she to look like a beggar when she enters that school?"

"Does she act like any maid of that name before her?" Lao-Po-Po countered crossly. "'Virtue is not developed by adorning the body!'"

But in spite of this opposition, Ho-ming dressed herself one morning in the new garments, and accompanied by her mother and the Lu girl, entered the school principal's office. The latter, a settled Chinese woman, after an exchange of greetings and explanations, began asking the applicant questions. With each one Ho-ming's hopes sank more deeply. No, she had never studied elsewhere; she could not recognize her own name; she could count only in speech; she had never held a pen. But for the Lu girl's presence, this mounting realization of complete ignorance could have been more easily borne. As it was, she would not again be able to face the people on her street! With each reply her voice grew lower.

Li Principal turned to the other girl, "Invite Jung Hsien-Seng to come here, then go to your classroom!" Waiting until the door had closed, she said in a kindly voice, "Wei Ih-Seng tells me you wish greatly to study. You are older than the girls in the first class, and so that time may not be wasted, the Honorable Physician wishes you to go into the higher grades just as soon as you are prepared to do the work. At the beginning do not let difficulties discourage you. Remember what the Great Sage said, 'To be fond of learning is to be near to knowledge.'"

A quarter of an hour later Ho-ming found herself seated at a desk in Jung Hsien-Seng's room. Here she

was to experience some of the most trying weeks of her life. Years afterward she could recall that first morning and the moon of days that followed. The average student was about eight years old; of all there, only one other was near her age and that one she discovered as time passed was too stupid to learn anything. The farm girl made endless mistakes and each moment was fraught with the possibility of painful embarrassment. Mechanically she went from home to school and from school to home, her mind the meanwhile trying to accustom itself to routine; to strange companions who politely hid their smiles at her errors, but were nonetheless amused; to the intricacies of the first National Reader, and to the fundamentals of arithmetic. The opportunity for study, craved so long and now in her possession, carried with it not delight, but torment.

On Saturday afternoons there were no lessons, and her parents insisted that this leisure be offered the woman doctor as a small return for what their daughter was receiving. "Though what use you will be to her, I do not know," Mother commented with unflattering candor.

Lao-Po-Po, regardless of what her thoughts might have been, vented none of the protest which had formerly attended her grandchild's public appearances. Had the old woman known, there was small need to worry. Weighed down by school cares, Ho-ming was now the picture of maidenly propriety as she went along the thoroughfare. Her new clothes and association with



other students had made her conscious of appearance; instead of occasional promises, her hair received daily brushing, and the small, prettily shaped hands were kept amazingly free of grime.

"You grow older, Me-me," Wei Ih-Seng complimented when six weeks of the school term had gone by.

Ho-ming's face lighted with humor; "If I do not learn soon to count on paper, I shall be like Grandmother, herself."

"White hairs are a sign of wisdom, certainly, though you are young to have them," the physician teased. "Be patient and you will learn! When I first studied English, I could not remember the strange sounds one day to another, but after a little ——" she disposed of past difficulties with a gesture.

In this encouraging atmosphere the new student temporarily forgot her troubles. The dispensary was an unceasing satisfaction to curiosity. Colored liquids and powders pleased the eye as much as the old druggist's jars of insects and snakes repelled. When Wei Ih-Seng left the place, Ho-ming remained out of sight in a room at the rear. There, under the tutelage of Wu Nurse, she learned to cut and roll bandages, to fill capsules with powder, to sterilize containers. For some time she considered this last duty a waste of effort, fuel, and good water. "Already that bottle is so clean it sparkles—why, then, wash it more? Not even vegetables are cooked this long."

"Germs there are that you cannot see, and the Honorable Doctor will have none of them."

"Germs — what are they?"

"Disease creatures that grow like mushrooms and spread illness."

"If you cannot see them, how, then, do you know what they are like?"

"In the hospitals are queer machines which cost much money. One looks through a small glass in these and everything becomes large." With a glance at Ho-ming's puzzled expression, Wu Nurse continued, "That way I felt when first I heard these things. Now I am used to wild ideas, but I do think, sometimes, that all of this boiling is not needed."

"You like nursing, is it not so?" questioned her young companion.

"Better it is than staying at home to help make paper and starve. What with war and bandits and high taxes, few people can afford to buy fireworks, or lanterns, or scrolls, and today paper makers grow thin. My parents are glad now," she admitted proudly, "that they did not betroth me several years ago. As it is, I help my own family when they need it instead of serving a husband's household."

This attitude was different from that of Wei Ih-Seng, Ho-ming sensed at once. The physician seemed interested in the smallest detail of her profession, and when she was present, the dispensary came alive. On one of these occasions, the latter caught up a fly swatter from a box she had just opened and held it out. "Take this with you, Me-me, it will help keep sickness from your door."

Ho-ming wielded the object once or twice. "Would that I had owned this when I killed mosquito demons!" she sighed.

"Tell me again about that!"

When this conversation ended, Ho-ming had received her first lesson in Public Health. She understood only a part, but one statement remained with her and from it she was never again to be free — there were no demons. For the rest of youth her mind was to continue as a battlefield where Lao-Po-Po and her contemporaries waged constant warfare with the modern generation, of which Wei Doctor and the teachers at the school were representative.

The fly swatter was added to other recently acquired treasures from the dispensary — a bar of scented soap, a toothbrush, a rough face cloth. Rapidly she was becoming a person of property, a condition which carried with it problems as well as pleasure, since Yuen-san wished especially to have the scented soap for his own. His sister, willing to share with him in most things, was equally determined to keep this for herself. Whenever she removed it from the hiding place to admire the smooth lavender surface and the odor it exhaled, Yuen-san would reach for the bar and, sniffing eagerly, would bargain for possession. Ho-ming remained adamant to all future promises. "Neither dates nor peanuts nor ginger do you have at present to give me. When your hands hold something, then may you talk with me about this soap. Not so easily do I part with a gift."



Both would have been surprised to know how soon he was to have desire granted and without either fruit or sweetmeats in exchange. Two months of school life had passed when a predicted eclipse of the moon became the chief topic of conversation. It was scheduled to occur one night in the Hour of the Pig, and earlier that day the two foreign teachers at the school gave brief scientific explanations to their classes. At the close Ho-ming's mind was a mass of undigested statements which had to do with interference of sun and moon and earth. Why sun and moon should get in each other's way was hard enough to believe, and that the earth where she walked should cast shadows on the sky above taxed her imagination to the limit.

At the evening meal all talked about the eclipse, but she did not mention her own rather doubtful information on the subject.

"Hun-deh guided a stranger through the town this afternoon and earned three coppers. He spent them at the firecracker shop. More customers there were than at New Year, he told me," Yuen-san announced.

"With good reason!" agreed Lao-Po-Po. "Nothing else sounds so loud and helps so much to keep the dragon from swallowing the moon."

"Better it would have been to give those three coppers to his parents," Sung Farmer criticized. "To-day his father asked me again for the loan of seed."

Grandmother muttered to herself in annoyance; Father went out into the street, and Yuen-san began searching among the cook pots. He came forward

with an old brass kettle. "May I beat this?" he asked his mother.

"If you are very careful — many uses it still has."

From each doorway on the street figures now emerged carrying gongs and rattles, kitchen utensils like Yuen-san's, long strings of firecrackers. Old as the world itself was this contest between light and darkness — a struggle in which man always had been but a puny spectator, who at first watched helplessly, and then adapted to this terrifying experience the same primitive weapon he had used on wild beasts and other enemies. Noise, when it was sufficiently great, never failed to frighten; noise, and noise only, might reach to those cold, vaulted spaces where the battle waged. And tonight, if the gods were kind, victory would once more crown effort as it had so often in the past.

"Is the moon really in danger, Mother?" Ho-ming asked while she cleared the table. "And does noise help to save it?"

"I do not know, Me-me, but that is what we have been taught. And the priests urge us to beat kettles and light firecrackers."

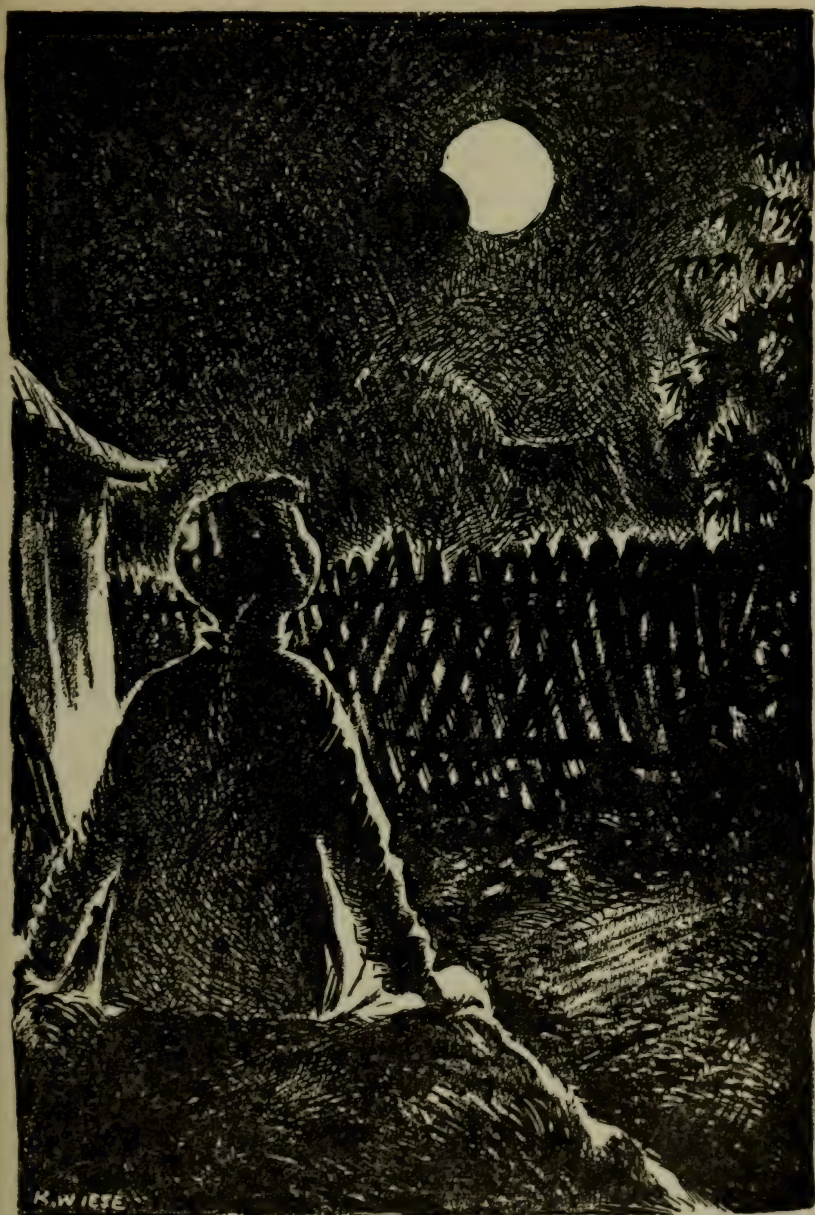
"But you think the priests are not always wise, is it not so? Only Grandmother ——"

"Sh-h!" Mother glanced hastily over her shoulder to see who was within hearing. "Whether useless or not, this is an old custom, and one thing, at least, is true," she said ending the conversation, "when men worry about the moon, they forget their own troubles."

Ho-ming worked at the next day's lessons until the steadily increasing din drove her to put them aside. Long past bedtime it was, but the eclipse had not even begun. She stepped to the doorway. Each member of the family was now a part of some chattering group, and formerly she, herself, would have been in the midst of things. A strange heaviness held her mind. That morning in school she had dared to ask the foreign teacher, Miss Bell, if America had the same custom. The answer, accompanied by a smile, had been, "No!" And yet America had a moon which had experienced eclipses; Bell Teacher had said so. It might be another moon — of that Ho-ming was not sure, but she wondered, nevertheless, what method the foreigners used instead of noise. A machine, doubtless — they had machines, it would seem, for everything else they did. At the school there was one which made light come and go in small glass balls suspended on cords from the ceilings of rooms. These were used instead of candles or even the fine lamps which burned the American oil. With another such affair Li Principal could press a button in her office and bells rang in the classrooms. Many others there were, she had been told, but these her own eyes had seen.

Slowly, without purpose, she walked to the rear of the house and sat on a hummock of earth. Above, the moon, a faint silver shape, pressed her lovely face against the deepening blue of autumn sky. Suddenly a thin black bar crept along one edge of the distant circle, and what had seemed a moment earlier but play-





Suddenly a thin black bar crept along one edge of the distant circle

ful festivity now took on growing seriousness. The noise increased in volume, and as the bar gradually widened, the night became darker. In the vast heaven the moon swung, the sinister shadow advancing slowly over her surface — swung and waited helplessly for men to frighten away that which threatened to extinguish her forever.

Ho-ming's eyes strained upward. Her thoughts, influenced by the deafening clamor and the rapidly dimming light, gave themselves over to fear. Suppose Grandmother and the priests knew after all! This beauty which night by night touched sleeping towns and countryside with calm, cool magic was dying before her very eyes. Her throat tightened. She could not bear it — she could not! The noise to which her ears were becoming accustomed seemed to decrease. Was it possible the crowd was lessening its effort? If only she could do something to help!

Yuen-san appeared suddenly in search of some object on the refuse pile. Catching sight of Ho-ming, he walked up to her and yelled, "Why do you sit here?"

"Why is the noise no louder?" she cross-questioned impatiently.

"No louder? Ai-ya! Almost my ears are ruined. Father gave me two coppers to purchase firecrackers, but with the sound already so great, I shall keep them."

"Of what use would be two coppers' worth?" his sister asked with scorn.

"More than you know. Hun-deh has a foreign oil tin — rusty with holes it is. He wishes me to buy a



large firecracker, add it to his small ones, and place them in the tin before lighting. He thinks the noise would be greater than anything on this street tonight."

"Then why not do as he asks?"

"What does it matter? I, myself, do not believe altogether in this business. Some of the men say it is just women's foolishness. And when the affair is over, I still have my two coppers."

"But Father gave them to you for this purpose! And what," she continued with a shiver, her eyes on the dwindling crescent of silver, "what if we should never see the moon again?"

Her brother shrugged his shoulders. "Always in the past the dragon has left before too much damage was done. As for the money, I shall be praised for thrift."

Ho-ming hesitated a second longer, then, "Suppose I gave you something for the money — would you buy the firecrackers?"

"You — what could you give me?" he demanded. Then as enlightenment grew, his tone changed, "The purple soap — give me that and I will do it!"

Promptly Yuen-san received the precious bar and was on his way to the Great Street. Ho-ming waited before the doorway, cold with excitement; watched while her brother returned and placed the firecrackers in the tin; heard her father call out to the crowd; then saw him stoop in a cleared spot and help the two boys touch a fuse. Instantly a thundering vibration followed, as the oil tin shot into the air and charred bits of paper joined the others carpeting the road.



"The moon!" someone shouted. "The moon, look, it is saved!"

There, emerging from what had become a solid blackness, was a tiny curve of light. Cheers and laughter followed. "That last noise did it," cried the crowd as they gathered about Yuen-san and Hun-deh.

When the full circle of light had once more reappeared, quiet descended. Weary toilers yawned and turned toward their own houses. "Did I not say that a great uproar was needed?" Lao-Po-Po reminded her family.

Yuen-san held a half-closed fist to his nostrils and drew deep breaths of delight over its contents. Surprisingly, he sneezed and Ho-ming giggled. "He who eats greedily pays with a pain," she admonished.

Early the next day Mei-li asked, "Why did you give that soap to Yuen-san?"

Ho-ming collected her school things and tied them in the square of cotton cloth. "Truly, this morning, I do not know. Last night I thought I could not bear to have the moon leave the sky, and when Go-go told me he had money for firecrackers but would not spend it, I offered him the soap if he would do so. Today in the sunshine I am not very sure. Perhaps the moon escapes each time as the foreign teacher said." Her eyes were full of doubt.

"The teachers at that school do not know everything. Lu's girl told me last night in the street that they talked yesterday about the earth and shadows. Such nonsense! And it may be those very firecrackers were

needed. Did you not see with your own eyes that the moon appeared immediately?” Mei-li paused after this long speech. “A piece of the purple soap,” she continued wistfully, “I would have liked to take with me when I go away.”

Ho-ming experienced a pang of dismay. “Has there been talk, Je-je?” she asked avoiding the word *marriage*. “And will you leave soon?”

“Not too soon, I hope, but I am already fifteen and more.”

Ho-ming patted her sister’s sleeve. “By the time you go, there may be something better than a bar of soap for you.” She slipped over the threshold and started across the fields to school.

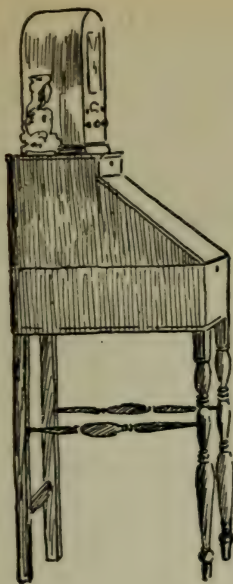
For a part of the way the possibility of Mei-li’s going through the gate to another home made her forget her former puzzling thoughts. But they were not to be dismissed for long. In the months just past she had been confronted by more tormenting questions than in all of her other years. She could recall clearly that day last spring in Li’s food shop and the frightened discussion of Feng-Shui. Well, there had been various troubles and even a slight earthquake to accompany the construction of the tall building, but the tea house remained and, what was more, prospered. Chen, the hot-water seller, was now securely established, and the town elder had recalled his family from their temporary haven of a distant farm.

Daily there came from Wuhu the busses which Grandmother had predicted the buffalo holding the earth

would never endure. And on sunny days great birds of wood and steel flew in the sky with mail and passengers from one city to another, and the Feng-Shui did nothing in retaliation. Last night she, Sung Ho-ming, had been possessed by an old, old fear and had sacrificed for it. This morning her feet were moving even now through a gateway into a building where such fears were subjects for tolerant amusement. It was beyond her understanding, and she sighed. Well, arithmetic, at least, was something about which no one seemed to have any doubts. Hastily closing the door to this hazy compartment of her mind, she began to review the process of simple addition.







## CHAPTER VII

### “GRACIOUS ME, BARBARIAN!”

AUTUMN faded bleakly into winter, was succeeded by another New Year's season with its shifting of semesters, and Ho-ming, thirteen years old, advanced to a higher class. Lessons, once so dreaded, were now stones on which she sharpened her wits as a cat its claws on wood. Even the troublesome business of counting with a pencil had assumed its correct place in her scheme of living, and the classics period was an ever-growing delight. With little difficulty she memorized characters and her plump fingers held a brush-pen as if born to it.

The scholarly old gentleman who taught this last subject watched the new student shade strokes, and

clicked his tongue softly with appreciation. Teaching in a foreign school was a fate he had never anticipated, and that girls should comprise the student body ran contrary to all of the traditions in which he had been trained. But reverses had robbed his family of leisure. With the consolation of books, he, himself, could have lived on almost nothing had he been free to do so. A great-nephew who showed much promise needed to be educated, and each of the youth's relations felt responsible to further this career. Coincidentally this grand-uncle had accepted his own share of the family burden and the position in the girls' school. While the work was not to his taste, the salary was fairer than he was likely to find elsewhere, and he made no complaint either at home or abroad. Once in a while he experienced a sharp pleasure in discovery, and Ho-ming proved one of these surprises.

At night the latter shared her new knowledge with the household. Father and Yuen-san could soon write their surname as well as other simpler words. Mei-li was more hesitant, "Too stupid I am to learn," she protested, shaking her head.

"And must I waste guest language contradicting you?" Ho-ming asked impatiently. "This is important, for when you go elsewhere to live, you will be treated with respect rather than abuse if you have some learning." Her imagination, started on this fresh path, leaped ahead. "Suppose no one in your new home can read. Some day an important paper is brought. The head of the house will draw his eyebrows



Ho-ming proved to be a surprise to the scholarly old gentleman





together and try to look wise as he puzzles over the characters. Then, to save face, he will say to the messenger, ‘Leave this with me — a grave matter it is which must be considered carefully!’ Later he will prepare to call on the village scholar that he may learn what the paper contains. At this time you will step forward and bow to the ground. You will say, ‘Forgive this Worthless One for mentioning it, but in my home I learned to recognize a few words and it may be I can read some of these.’ They will open their eyes widely while you do so, and afterwards, when you have gone back to your scouring, one will say to the other, ‘This newcomer — she is not too bad to have in the household.’ ”

Mei-li stood open-mouthed listening to this. At the close she declared, “Were you a man, you would earn a fortune as a story-teller. I have not yet learned to make the first stroke, and already I read important papers — ai-ya! As for such daring,” she smiled wryly, “you dream that I am you.”

“Perhaps! But now you learn to write.” Ho-ming pushed the pen between this unwilling student’s fingers and commenced the lesson.

That the whole family was benefiting from the younger girl’s opportunity was evident. As she studied her geography aloud, the others would repeat unfamiliar names of provinces and cities and then ask questions about them. Conversation heretofore limited to the more prosaic subjects of daily existence now carried this farm household far afield.

One evening Mother broke in on some of the memorizing with the remark, "To be a teacher is hard on the ears."

"In school they do not permit us to study aloud."

"And what new method is this?" Yuen-san asked. "At Giao Scholar's classroom on the Great Street each pupil sits on a high stool and tries to make his voice heard above all of the others. Once or twice I stopped to listen, but I could understand nothing, so mixed were their words."

"Naturally! How can anyone learn that way?" Ho-ming asked with scorn. "At the foreign school we sit quietly in our desks; one student at a time rises to recite."

"And your tongue remains still that long?" her brother tormented. "Can I believe it?"

On each Saturday appearance at the dispensary, Wei Ih-Seng would ask, "This week what have you studied, Me-me?"

"Farming," Ho-ming told her with a tolerant smile one warm spring day. "As if a country girl needed that! I, myself, would rather read books."

"So you learned nothing?"

The student considered. "Little; moreover, we planted yellow turnips and that red vegetable the foreigners like. Do they grow, who will wish to eat them?"

"'Carrots' and 'tomatoes' are good for you."

"What did you call them, Honorable Doctor?"

"'Carrots' and 'tomatoes' — they are the English names. Say them after me!"



Ho-ming stopped cutting gauze and parrot-like repeated the strange sounds until they were conquered. This was pleasant, indeed, to learn English as well as so much else. After a time she continued with amusement her account of the farming lesson: “Several girls made chopsticks of twigs and straw to pick up the lumps of earth. When Miss Bell, who teaches that subject, scolded, they said it was not the custom for book students to soil their hands. For what other reason but that had scholars always worn long finger nails? You should have heard her answer. ‘All work is good,’ she told them, ‘to handle earth for growing plants is as important as to hold a pen correctly.’ A strange doctrine! Have farmers ever been equal to scholars?”

“When farmers are given the chance to study and when scholars are willing to do something else than acquire written knowledge, then will this land be much happier. For that very reason you learn gardening at the school, not simply to grow vegetables that foreigners like,” Wei Ih-Seng replied enigmatically, and turned her attention to a prescription.

On hearing this later, Lao-Po-Po sniffed, “Such nonsense! Have we not always had scholars and farmers — each is important. Why then should one do another’s work?”

“To the north of the Great River many farmers are being taught to read, so I was told in the tinsmith’s shop the other day,” Father announced. “There was a stranger present from that province. He said that

groups of people study the Thousand Character Lessons together. Anyone who wishes may become a student, and whole families attend these classes."

"Not women and girls, also?" his mother demanded. Then, as he admitted this possibility, she added morosely, "Certain it is that all of our virtues belong to the past."

"Who tills the soil and prepares food while all study?" inquired Sung Farmwife.

"I, myself, asked that question. They work as usual sparing only an hour from each day, though how much can be learned in that time I do not understand. Many years are needed to train a scholar, and this may be after all but a traveler's tale."

"Tell me those two foreign words you learned!" ordered Yuen-san. A little later he strode into the street prepared to dazzle his associates with this new accomplishment.

"Carrots" and "tomatoes" were but the beginning of Ho-ming's English vocabulary in the spring and summer. At the dispensary she asked the physician constantly for additional words. Wu Nurse, with only the simplest command of the foreign tongue remaining from her two years of training, proved less willing to assist. "Why should I work to remember these strange sounds? In this town of what use is English?"

Ho-ming gave the other a swift, appraising glance. "Do you expect to stay here always?" came the question in return.

The older girl stifled a yawn. “Where else?” Then she added jocosely, “You, Me-me, will doubtless go far away as did the Honorable Doctor.”

“Perhaps,” was the cool reply. “One thing only I know — now while I may study, I do so.”

And study Ho-ming did — everything that touched the surface of her present life. “In affairs of healing, we of the Middle Kingdom know nothing,” she criticized one morning after a discussion in the drug shop on impure drinking water.

Wei-Ih-Seng smiled tolerantly. “That we learn much about these matters from the foreigners is true, but a few things we teach them. Only today Americans and Europeans are discovering the value of medicines which Chinese have used for centuries. This fault is ours — that we have permitted the great wisdom of the past to be buried beneath the foolish superstitions of our old women.”

In September the doctor spoke once again to Li Principal, and Ho-ming was granted special permission to enter the beginners’ class in English. Gray Teacher, the young American instructor, was the most popular member of the faculty. In her classroom, as in that of the old classics scholar, knowledge was a treasure chest into which each student dipped according to desire. The flying moments were colored by the teacher’s quest for enrichment of mind; moods changed with the passing winds of thought; and the corridors echoed frequently to spontaneous bursts of hilarity from this quarter.



Here Ho-ming soon made a place for herself. The foreign language was something she was eager to acquire and in this class lessons seemed to have almost no connection with effort and application. Possessing little of the shyness that characterized many of her schoolmates, she did not hesitate to ask questions, and by the close of the first term in her second year she had become an accepted leader. Safe in the past was the humiliating ignorance of the early days. With flattering attention the other students now sought her out; called to her across the campus, "Sung Ho-ming, tell us how to say this word!" and "Ho-ming, do you spell 'call' with two 'l's' or two 'r's'?" Mei-li's friend, the Lu girl, to whom study was a prized but nonetheless painful opportunity, eyed her younger neighbor in admiration mixed with puzzled wonder. And daily the object of this attention and observation grew more certain of her own ability.

Just before midyears the members of English I listened with dismay to Gray Teacher's announcement that she was leaving for a period of study in her own America. The room echoed to a chorus of groans and ejaculations. "If this Honorable One goes, our hearts will be too sad for study! Pity us! And from whom shall we learn English? Miss Bell already has many other classes!"

Miss Gray smiled. "Lay down your hearts!" she told them in Chinese. "When school reopens, another teacher from America will be here to help you. By the time I return you will be saying everything in English."

The expected departure created unusual excitement. Small tributes of knitting and embroidery, packages of dates and tea, and other articles found their way into the rapidly bulging luggage of the traveler. Ho-ming, still not famous for handiwork and with no money to purchase a gift, spent all spare moments copying with painstaking penmanship several examples of Confucian wisdom on a sheet of flowered rice paper, and this she presented with pride to the grateful recipient.

When the New Year holiday was over and English I again filed into the familiar room, Ho-ming brushed aside her companions' chatter, sat down at the desk she had formerly occupied, and glanced about her. The blackboards stared as darkly vacant as on any other morning of the year; on the large, colored photograph of Peiping's Altar of Heaven, marble tiers continued to cut the blue, cloudless sky; everything was the same — everything, she told herself with dissatisfaction, save that Miss Gray was gone from the familiar place at the front of the room and with her the sense of adventure which had attended all of her classes.

As the second bell sounded its shrill peal, the principal, accompanied by a strange young woman, entered the door. The class rose politely, bowed in greeting, and stood while Li Principal introduced the new teacher, first in English then in Chinese. "Miss Llewellyn, whose name with us will be Liu, is a newcomer to this land. She has had no time to study our language, an easy task otherwise for one of her talents, and in her presence you will speak English only. For you

that will be a good method — much faster will you learn." Smiling she changed her speech again to the foreign tongue, "Miss Llewellyn, with this class you will have no trouble. Good students they are, all of them." In a lower tone she addressed a few final remarks to the young woman beside her, raised her hand in a gesture for the girls to be seated, and left the room.

Ho-ming's interest was already centered on the new teacher. "Miss Rewenel — ai, what a name!" In it were more of the English 'l's' and 'r's' and 'n's' than she had ever met together. Fortunate it was that the character, Liu, had been given as a surname; otherwise, how would anyone ever address this stranger? So, she knew no single word of Chinese! And, perhaps, not much else — she looked very stupid. Here were no bright, dark eyes like Miss Gray's, but pale blue ones. Her hair was of a light yellow and her skin pink as a baby pig's. Ho-ming's glance slid to a classmate across the aisle and at the same moment their cautiously shaped lips pronounced the verdict, "C'heo si la!" (Ugly unto death!)

Meanwhile the object of this scrutiny, in her own land considered above the average in prettiness, stood in embarrassed silence before the large desk and wondered how to begin her work. That she had no real idea was plainly apparent to the eleven girls who now watched with unblinking attention, measured her with their racial yardstick of poise, and found her at the start, lacking. Natural courtesy and tolerance



were overshadowed by a growing feeling of resentment that this immature, unattractive person should have been selected to fill Miss Gray's, of all places, and in the first quarter of an hour Miss Llewellyn's immediate future with this particular group had been settled.

From the beginning the new teacher, herself, was aware of strain. She was fresh from college, and except for practice work under helpful supervision, had not previously ventured to control a class even in her own America. She had been told that Chinese girls were diligent and respectful, requiring almost no discipline. Gratitude was one of their race's best known virtues, and in a short time they would certainly show their appreciation of her having come so far to help in schooling them.

When the first week passed with no slightest fulfillment of this expectation, Miss Llewellyn's mind experienced a puzzled surprise. Instead of eager students, she found in this group eleven girls stupid beyond imagination; instead of respect, the very air of the room was charged with insolence; as for appreciation, she became painfully and increasingly aware that before her were the severest critics she had ever faced. A broader training would have told her that in some ways the class was having an equal amount of difficulty. They had, after all, completed only a half year of work in English and even Ho-ming, with the extra practice at the dispensary, could understand but a small part of the new teacher's ill-adapted vocabulary — much of which was as unfamiliar to the students'

ears as were the Chinese sounds to Miss Llewellyn's own.

Accordingly, the days were spent at cross purposes, and neither had any patience with the other. Except for marked tightening of lips, sighs of ennui, or an occasional exchange of knowing glances, the girls managed usually to control outward antagonism. Miss Llewellyn was less successful. A nervous laugh, somewhat startling to listeners, punctuated her speech at the most unexpected moments, and as annoyance grew, her lips gave vent frequently to the harmless though entirely unintelligible exclamation, "Gracious me!"

"A barbarian indeed is this American," the class agreed in corridors and on campus as they mimicked laugh and speech.

"Ai, and to think she comes from the same land as that of Miss Gray and Miss Bell."

"Miss Bell has been here so long she is almost Chinese. It may be with a little time this one also will improve," a good-humored girl suggested.

"Perhaps," admitted Ho-ming but without hope. "One thing, though, is certain — no English do we learn this term."

By the end of the second week the new teacher was desperate. Her other classes, more advanced in work and with a less intense devotion to her predecessor, were coöperating nicely, but in this one she had as yet accomplished nothing. It was with a worried mind and leaden feet that she entered English I on the third Monday morning, opened the roll book, and began the dreaded

task of stumbling through the names. This performance the girls enjoyed as little as did she, for only by counting could they keep track of the mispronounced syllables.

Today the fifth girl, Li Hwei-chih, engaged in contemplating a persimmon tree from which hung henna globes of ripening fruit just outside the window next her desk, forgot for the moment to listen. She was startled into sudden awareness by a nudge from a companion and looked up to hear Miss Llewellyn ask sharply, "Isn't that your name?"

At a loss Hwei-chih fell back on her own language. "Shen — mo? (What?)"

"Use English! What did you say?"

" 'What,' — I said — 'what,' " replied Hwei-chih.

"What?" Miss Llewellyn's brain staggered around this circle. "Gracious me!" she exclaimed with exasperation, then repeated emphatically, "What is your name?"

"Li Hwei-chih."

"Then why did you not recognize it at once?"

"Reco —," Hwei-chih swallowed helplessly and Ho-ming stepped into the breach.

"She does not understand, Miss Rewenner. We know very few words of English," she went on apologetically, then with characteristic curiosity spoiled this attempt at peacemaking: "Glacious me is what meaning, Miss Lewerren?"

Someone giggled — tinder to the instructor's flare of annoyance. She turned angrily to Ho-ming. "Speak



when you are spoken to, and since you cannot pronounce my name correctly, then call me Lü Teacher!"

With the other students there was a sibilant intake of breath, but Ho-ming stood with unchanged countenance. What a temper this barbarian had! Well, Lü, the word for donkey, she had named herself instead of the Liu character which had been selected for her, and Lü, or donkey, it should be. "Certainly, Lü Teacher," she said gravely and amid stifled laughter sank to her seat.

Miss Llewellyn's skin flushed and her eyes blazed, "What did you say that they laugh?" she demanded.

Martyr-like Ho-ming rose again. "Lü Teacher heard," she reproached with an innocent air. "I said, 'Certainly, Lü Teacher,' that is all."

With each repetition of the word for donkey the class found self-possession more difficult. The instructor, equally disturbed but in a different way, made a violent effort to swallow her irritation. Laying aside the roll book she caught up a reader and commanded, "Turn to page four."

When they were freed from this period, the other girls gathered about Ho-ming. "Lü Teacher, Lü Teacher," they mocked gleefully. "Almost we died of laughter. How did you dare to call her that?"

"Did she not name herself?" was the reply, then candidly, "her disposition is not very good and I like her not even a little."

That Miss Llewellyn felt much the same was evident. Once in her own room in the house shared by faculty

and the few boarding students who came from a distance, she locked the door and threw herself across the bed in a spasm of homesickness. Why had she ever come here? Inspiring students! English I was anything but that. All she did with them was to lose her temper. But that girl, Ho-ming — really! And she was under contract to this school for a year; what was worse, she could not even ask for an exchange of classes. Miss Bell was the only other English-speaking person on the faculty and she already had more work than could be cared for properly.

In the weeks that followed Miss Llewellyn conducted her work in English I with studied control and between her and the students existed a sort of armed truce. Helped by each day's experience, she was learning to simplify her speech to their needs and they began to respond with an intelligence which she had not supposed they possessed. The girls, liking her neither more nor less than on that first day, accepted her as a necessary evil and set their minds on the distant time when Miss Gray would return and English would once more be the most popular subject in the course.

Ho-ming, on the other hand, viewed the new teacher with no such impartial attitude. On her head at every hint of insubordination there continued to fall Miss Llewellyn's sharpest barbs of reproof, and only the determination to succeed in school forced the former into safe paths of conduct. Enemies they were, and had someone told them that the future might effect a

change in their relations, both teacher and student would have hastened to deny the possibility.

One morning as the class sat with books opened to the old tale, "The Town Musicians of Bremen," one of the readers stumbled over the word "goblins." Miss Llewellyn offered the correct pronunciation, and as a lack of understanding met her gaze, explained, "Evil spirits." She added one of the few Chinese words she had picked up, "Kwei."

"Kwei — demons, devils — so!" echoed the girls. After all the foreigners did have devils. The book said so, and now a teacher straight from America had admitted it, too.

Ho-ming sat silent. This time the "donkey" had stepped into a wasp nest indeed. A half dozen voices drowned each other suddenly in the effort to relate experiences with devils which their own mothers or grandmothers or distant cousins' wives had had in the past.

Miss Llewellyn gestured for silence. "There are no real devils," she told them tolerantly.

"No real devils?" returned the girls. What of her own words a moment earlier? What of this book open before them?

"The robbers in the story just thought they were devils or goblins — they were animals, you know, that looked into the window."

"If there are no evil spirits, then why did the robbers think these animals were 'gobbrins'?" asked Hwei-chih.



One question followed another, and the argument might have continued indefinitely but for each side's limited knowledge of the other's vocabulary. During the recess period her classmates demanded of Ho-ming, "Why did you say nothing?"

"When everyone else talks," she grinned, "should I also waste words?" For a moment she studied the faces about her, cast a cautious, half-frightened glance over her shoulder, and then announced challengingly, "I, myself, do not believe altogether in devils."

A silence in which fear and awe were mingled greeted this remark. It was broken finally by one of the boarding students. "You would not make so foolish a statement if you knew as much as I." She waited for this to impress her audience before continuing in a whisper, "Liu Teacher keeps a devil prisoned in her very room." Provoked by incredulous expressions she added, "Two nights has it been there and strange sounds does it make — sometimes like a man speaking or a woman singing, sometimes both at once."

"Have you never listened to a phonograph?" twitted Hwei-chih. "As for the woman who sang — that might have been Liu Teacher herself."

"Not before has she sung. I know, for our room is just across the hall from the 'donkey's.' Last night the other teachers visited her there. The door was closed; they laughed and talked and we could not hear clearly; later, after they left, someone played a fiddle and ——"

"The cook has a fiddle," interrupted a classmate.

The boarding student turned impatiently. "This was not the cook. When the music stopped, a man's voice spoke first in Chinese, then in English. He said, 'This is RUOK, Shanghai talking!' I, myself, heard him say it. Would anything but a devil talk like that?"

Her companions no longer smiled. Such an affair was queer certainly. Ho-ming's eyes were alight. She said, half to herself, "I wish I might see in that room."

"Why not?" the first speaker wished to know. "Very simple it is. After school each day Miss Llewellyn plays tennis with girls from the upper class. She goes to her room, gets the knock-ball-stick, changes her shoes, and leaves. For an hour or more she remains on the court. At that time anyone may look in her room."

It was plain that this girl had already done so, Ho-ming told herself. Aloud she said, "Looking in strange rooms is a custom which thieves have — I like it little. Also, suppose a servant should catch me."

"When the morning work is finished, the servants do nothing more in our hall. But whether you go or not is of no matter to me," the other assured, shrugging her shoulders. "I understand. I, myself, would not care to enter that room at present. Bad enough it is to live so close!"

Ho-ming weakened at the insinuation of fear; impulsively she promised, "This afternoon I go with you."

To a chorus of admiring protests from her companions she swung off in the direction of Jung Hsien-Seng's arithmetic class, and not until the middle of the

afternoon did she pause to consider her decision more carefully. With a growing sense of misgiving, she later followed the boarding student to her room, waited until Miss Llewellyn was safe on the tennis court, and then found herself alone outside the latter's door. Once there, her immediate instinct was to flee, but after a second she steadied. One thing she must do — open this door and look within, otherwise she would lose forever that place of leadership so recently won among her classmates. With a twist the knob responded to her hand and she stepped over the sill.

In the room all was quiet and orderly. The small iron bed, similar to those used by students, was hidden by a soft blue cover across which gay-colored flowers trailed. Some of the same material hung at the windows. She wondered if the flowers were embroidered on the cloth. Once again the desire to know conquered fear; she stepped forward, the door swung softly to behind her, and in another moment she had investigated and proved that the floral design on Miss Llewellyn's cretonne was made with neither stitches nor paint.

On a little table beside the bed were a foreign clock, several books, a bottle of medicine and a partially unfolded handkerchief. Ho-ming picked up the clock and waited, without result, to have it ring a little bell as Wei Doctor's timepiece had done on one occasion. Perhaps Wei Ih-Seng had paid more for hers, she decided, putting it down. The bottle of medicine once the cork was removed caused her to choke and tears to



run from her eyes. Ai-ya! This was what the physician prescribed for many patients. The books, all in English, had names she could not read. More were on a set of shelves — five, ten, twenty, twenty-seven, thirty-one, thirty-eight books this barbarian had. Rich she must be indeed.

Turning about, she saw herself in a mirror swung above an old-fashioned bureau. From this latter piece of furniture she caught up a brush and smoothed her hair; opened three jars of sweet-smelling creams, sampled their contents with a finger tip and then replaced the tops. To her right was a small closed desk on top of which sat a soapstone vase and an odd-looking box. She eyed the vase calculatingly — on the street this had probably cost almost half of one dollar. As for the box, she had never seen anything like it.

In the wooden front were set small pieces of silk and in these round button-like knobs. She lifted a hand and touched one of them. Under pressure it moved slightly. A sound somewhere in the house drew her attention for a second to the door, and with a smile of disdain she recalled the foolish statements of the boarding student across the hall. She, Sung Ho-ming, had been in this room for a number of minutes, and what had happened? The words died away on her tongue. There on the box around one of the little knobs a strange light shone. Certainly it had not been there before. Her mouth felt dry and in her legs a shaky sensation developed. She would leave this room at once. With an effort she raised one foot, and



Turning about, Ho-ming saw herself in the mirror

at the same moment a man's voice called out loudly, "XGOA, Nanking."

Fastened to the spot, Ho-ming stood swaying in terror as the voice ran on, changed abruptly to a woman's, and then to singing. Her mind was obsessed by one idea — to escape from this evil which, though surrounding her, she could not even see nor locate. That the box with the light was a part of it she felt sure, but for such great noise to be contained in so small a space was unthinkable. Caught she was in a web of her own foolish winding — caught — and the next moment might — ! The unfinished thought turned to a shriek as something clutched her shoulder. In a frenzy of resistance she struggled to be free and swinging wildly about looked up into the astonished face of Miss Llewellyn. Trembling from head to foot and unable to believe her own eyes, Ho-ming stared, then leaning weakly against the bureau gasped out her relief in painful breaths. What would happen now that her enemy had found her here was beyond imagination, but of one thing she was sure — nothing could be worse than what might have befallen had the other not appeared at all.

Miss Llewellyn, returning for extra tennis balls, had been surprised in the hallway by the sound of her new radio and, hastening into the room, had discovered as culprit that student whom she considered the chief cause of all her troubles. She had a very human desire to scare Ho-ming into a different attitude for the future, and approaching noiselessly she had placed a firm hand



on the latter's shoulder. Much to her surprise a moment of intense physical struggle followed, and the face that finally looked into hers held such depths of fear that the young woman was completely disconcerted. Gradually enlightenment dawned. With a swift movement she reached over to the radio and switched off the current.

In the ensuing silence neither spoke, and Miss Llewellyn with rare thoughtfulness turned her attention determinedly to the machine, flecked imaginary dust from its surface and began a hasty discussion of the relative entertainment to be found in Chinese and American programs of the air. "My older brother," her voice warmed affectionately on this word, "likes to play with radio machines. He wished me to have one out here, so I bought this when I passed through Shanghai. It came only three days ago. At nights it helps me not to be too homesick."

Ho-ming listened with mixed emotions. This thing which had scared her almost to death was but another foreign machine and not the work of demons. A weight lifted from her mind; at the first opportunity she would ask Wei Ih-Seng to explain the matter fully. Awaiting some action on the part of her adversary, she threw the latter a cautious glance, but Miss Llewellyn still fingered the wooden box. As yet she had neither scolded nor demanded an explanation. She had not even laughed, and in justice Ho-ming was forced to admit that Miss Gray with the wider background of understanding could not have done more.

Amazingly the barbarian had become a real individual. She had an older brother whom she loved — that was plain, and she confessed to homesickness, a disease which Ho-ming had supposed limited to her own people.

Miss Llewellyn now turned with a smile. "I must go since they wait for me on the court. Come to see me some time after school and we will play this machine together."

This magnanimity drew forth a swift apology from the intruder. "I did wrong to come here today, Liu Teacher," she hesitated, cheeks flushing, "you are very kind and I thank you." Her eyes narrowed suddenly. "Honorable One, say this word after me — Liu! No — this way!" She repeated the word slowly several times until Miss Llewellyn had mastered sound and inflection. "That is your name and please do not call it something else," she begged, then bowing herself away sped down the hall.

Before school opened the next morning, English I gathered about the heroine. "What happened?" "Did you really find a devil?" "And were you not frightened to death?" her classmates wished to know.

Ho-ming smiled with a superior air. "In that room there is nothing strange except another foreign machine. It is a little like the phonograph; you turn a button and different sounds come from it."

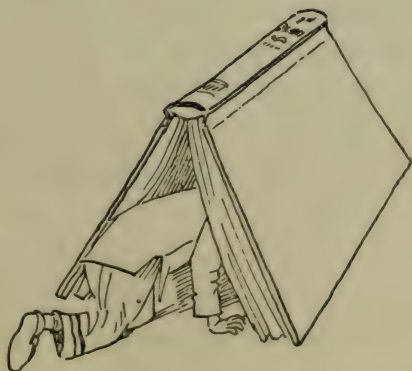
"Nevertheless I heard you cry out just after 'the Donkey' entered her room," defended the boarding student.

"Ai-ya! Did she catch you?" the other girls asked, their eyes dilated.

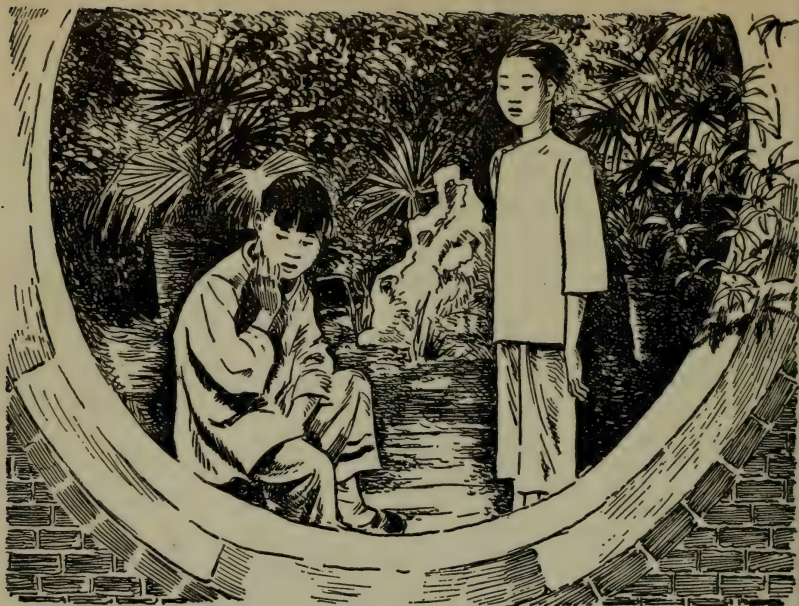
"She returned to her room for more tennis balls," Ho-ming replied, pushing aside the embarrassing reference to a shriek. "Very gracious she was, talking with me of her home and asking me to visit her again. She cannot, of course, help her looks, but she has a good heart, I believe, and I, for one, shall not again call her 'Donkey,' " she finished with an expressive glance at the boarding student.

"So, there was no devil in that room after all!" they commented soberly.

Ho-ming started up the school steps. "Did I not say that I, myself, did not believe ten tenths in demons?" she called back over her shoulder and disappeared within the door.







## CHAPTER VIII

### WE WHO ARE YOUNG!

ALL of that spring Grandmother was ailing and demanded her daughter-in-law's undivided attention. Mei-li was weighted down by household duties as well as the many additional demands of farm life for which her father and Yuen-san could find no leisure. Each evening Ho-ming had less time for study, and when school closed for the summer, there fell on her own shoulders much of the work which had formerly been the older girl's.

In the sick room an endless stream of complaints issued from the old woman. This illness would, she knew with certainty, cause her death. "And not yet have I a coffin; moreover, with money wasted as it

is in this household," she berated her patient nurse, "how then will my son bury me decently?" Tears of self-pity gathered under the half-closed eyelids, "Had I but a few cash, we could invite the old pharmacist to come and save my life."

"This morning, Old One, when I asked you to let me send again for him, you told me his last medicine made you worse."

"Ever since you first crossed this threshold, it has been the same — always your tongue is ready with excuse," came the spiteful reply, then after a pause, "and his medicine did make my stomach hurt to death! Perhaps the priests from the temple would have known more."

"If you wish us to call the priests, we shall manage it," Mother assured.

"And did I say I wanted the priests? Would I so easily ask my son to throw away silver earned by much hard toil? Ai-ya, when I am gone, extravagance will bring all under this roof to starvation!"

Ho-ming, working in the next room with her sister, stopped in the middle of a task to comment, "How our mother bears such scolding, I do not know. Nothing she does is right. Yesterday she spent heart preparing that special dish for which Lao-Po-Po asked; when it was served, Grandmother sniffed, wrinkled her nose, and turned away. 'It is fit only for the pigs,' she said and would not even taste it."

Mei-li nodded understanding. "Lao-Po-Po's disposition is not very good, I know, but great trouble

she has borne. Four of her children died within one moon of plague. Also her mother-in-law, she told me once, beat her often."

"Perhaps even then, 'Four horses could not overtake Grandmother's tongue,'" Ho-ming conjectured shrewdly. "Do you believe Mother will treat thus the wife Yuen-san brings home? No!" This idea held her, "Queer it will seem, Je-je, to have a strange girl in the house."

"It may be neither you nor I will then be here," Mei-li commented in a muffled tone. Her lips were trembling as she continued, "Would that I might stay forever with all that is familiar."

In a warm rush of affection the other attempted comfort, "Good you are and much happiness do you deserve! Certainly you can work no harder elsewhere. In the new home they may have a small slave girl and you will find leisure to do the sewing you like."

Her sister smoothed back a moist strand of hair. "Slave girl?" she echoed. "They are poorer than we, so it is said, though of course I do not know," she added with embarrassment. "As for work — I like to work."

Ho-ming looked at her intently. "And do you never wish to do anything other than household tasks?" she asked, following the older girl outside. There the two stood for a minute glancing across sunlit fields where the menfolk of the community bowed over the soil.

"Our plants have twice as many beans as those of our neighbors," Mei-li offered, as though she had not



heard her sister's question. Without further ado she returned to it, "Housework is important if families are to eat and live. Were I the daughter of a rich mandarin that would be different. I would spend my days embroidering silk threads. Many beautiful colors there are, and I like to feel them." She paused to consider her hands. "Fingers rough as mine would soon tangle the skeins," she concluded practically and bent down to care for a sick fowl.

Through the long, hot weeks Ho-ming strove to do her share of the work willingly, but she missed the stimulation of school and drug shop. Her father and brother returned from toil too weary for anything but a hasty meal and bed. And when Yuen-san had a free moment, he no longer wasted it on his younger sister.

At fifteen the boy was almost a man and his interests — aside from the hours in the field — were shared only with companions of his own age and sex. He now trained fighting crickets seriously that in the freer evenings of autumn these small combatants might be pitted against others of their kind. Gambling with dominoes and hanging about the tea house were forbidden by his father, and there remained only one other amusement, kite flying. He and Hun-deh, closer friends with each year of association, spent hours designing and pasting together beasts and insects made from strips of bamboo and gay-colored rice paper.

In occasional spare moments their fragile achievements were carried to the nearest hill and set free to

wind and sky. There the two youths would sit, reeling in and out these symbols of flight, while they discussed what seemed important to their lives. At times a droning airplane claimed attention, and the kites, objects temporarily lost to interest, would dip wildly toward the earth.

Hun-deh in particular was fascinated by the foreign birds of steel. "My great-uncle who keeps the silk shop in Wuhu, his eldest son earns money working inside a flying machine," he boasted one noontide.

"What does he do in it?" Yuen-san asked lazily, torn between the knowledge that he should be in the fields at this very minute and the desire to remain indefinitely on the cool hillside.

"He drops foreign oil into the wheels," Hun-deh gestured in explanation, "and other important things. He is, I think, a very clever man, for those machines are marvels indeed."

"Not so wonderful," contradicted his friend. "Only recently have the foreigners used these birds. One night when I leaned on the railing of the new tea house an airplane flew overhead. Giao Scholar was being served; I heard him tell the others that in ancient days one of our generals made a great wooden machine of this sort. In it many of his soldiers were carried across a mountain to the enemy's camp and there won victory."

"So! Perhaps the foreigners copied this idea also from us. But whether ours or theirs, I would still like to ride just once high above the earth."

By the middle of the eighth moon, Lao-Po-Po, wearying of the rôle of invalid, decided she was much better. Mother was now released from the sick room and began immediately to pick up the somewhat snarled threads of her home life and weave them into their usual even pattern. Ho-ming, after an absence of weeks, returned to the dispensary. There she found unexpected demand for her services — Wu Nurse had treated lightly once too often the laws of hygiene and was at home in the paper shop with a badly infected hand.

Wei Doctor greeted her protégé's entrance with a pleased smile. "Good it is to see you! And is your grandmother no longer ill?"

"At no time has she been more than a little sick, Honorable Physician, but today my household is again as it was, Kuan-yin be thanked! And I am here."

"Is it custom for virtuous maids to thus criticize the old?"

Ho-ming's eyes lowered, but she made no reply. When Wei Doctor spoke again, it was to say, "I should have left here much earlier. Within the past twenty hours two people have died out at the beggar huts, and I would know the cause. I go to ask questions."

"Suppose they refuse to answer, Wei Ih-Seng, what then?"

"Should the disease be cholera, others will have sickened before this, and I shall need to use nothing but my eyes."

"Cholera!" Ho-ming repeated aghast. "Are you not afraid to go there?" she asked with a shiver.



"Truly, but do I not go, people may die needlessly! Fear, Me-me," she said with a grave smile, "fear is worse than any plague." With an order to the manservant concerning the shop, she led the way toward the inner room where a woman sat darning stockings. "While I am gone, Sung Ho-ming, you had better fill capsules with this powder," she suggested, pushing forward a bottle. "Next clean out the drawers of the tall cabinet and replace their contents in order. In Wu Nurse's absence no one has attended to these matters."

Ho-ming's first act after the physician's departure was to examine the stockings on which the mending woman worked. "Very soft these foreign ones are — almost like silk," she admired.

The other grunted and paused to pick her teeth with the needle. "Soft, yes! But my feet would feel bare in anything so thin — stout muslin ones are more suitable. The foreigners, however, care little about what is proper; much meat do they show, with no collars and only halves of sleeves to their garments. For my part I am glad I am a Middle Kingdom woman."

"The Honorable Doctor is not a foreigner!"

"Did I say she was?" came the prompt retort. "You talk too freely for one of your age — has your mother taught you no manners?"

A heavy silence fell on the room. Flushing slightly, Ho-ming went about the duties assigned her. Twice since she entered the shop today she had been scolded for careless speech. She would go to her grave, she



Ho-ming knew enough not to interrupt Wei Doctor



supposed, without learning when to use her tongue. But, her mind argued in self-defense, Grandmother *had not* been really ill; and this sewing-woman *had* connected Wei Ih-Seng with the slighting criticism of foreigners.

Three hours later the physician returned, paid and dismissed the mender, then sat down on a stool beside the square table and gazed into space. Ho-ming knew enough not to interrupt; she had seen this happen on other occasions when a serious case had to be considered.

In course of time Wei Doctor broke the silence. "The daughter of the Wen family has returned from her school in Shanghai. Just outside the money-lender's gate, a servant halted my ricksha and invited me inside. I went without question, supposing someone was ill, and before I could pass into the women's courts, that young lady met me in the main reception hall. After a hasty greeting she demanded that I tell her of what illness those beggars had died." Wei Ih-Seng smiled wryly at the recollection. "Whatever she has learned in her studies, it is not politeness. She understood, she told me, that there had been more deaths than two and that many others were ill; should plague be the cause, her intention was to return at once to Shanghai." Humor flitted over the usually serious countenance, "It gave me pleasure to scare her — I insisted that any cholera which might be in this town had come up the Great River from that very city."

Ho-ming was listening breathlessly, "And was it that those beggars had, Learned One?"



Amusement faded into thoughtfulness, "Not cholera, Me-me, but what I am not sure — food poisoned by heat, perhaps, for the two men were brothers under one roof. The priests were making a great noise about the dead and I was not permitted to enter. Beggars with money for priests!" she exclaimed impatiently, "while their children — ai! — when I think of those huts I, myself, grow sick. Any plague might well start there."

Reports of a rapidly increasing epidemic of cholera came through daily from Shanghai and the southern provinces. Wei Doctor began a preventive campaign more intensive than any the town had yet experienced. Whenever possible, she discussed the subject with individuals or lectured to groups. A coolie was paid to stick posters on all available wall space. These sheets warned the populace not to drink unboiled water; to eat no raw fruits or vegetables; to kill flies; to avoid others who were ill.

The townspeople were divided in their minds between dread of cholera and doubts of the wisdom contained in this unsolicited advice. Who would wish to drink cold water when hot tea might be had? Only foreigners were so foolish. As to cooking fruits, did disease demons make their homes in apricots and pomegranates? Or in vegetables? Most vegetables were steamed, anyway. And of course one had nothing more important to do than kill flies — each spring this doctor urged the same activity against mosquitoes — if one were a good Buddhist, he did not kill anything!

To stay away from the sick was the most sensible statement on the papers, for only the stupid or ignorant would visit such obvious victims of supernatural wrath.

With deference the women listened to the young physician's lectures on prevention, and then returned home smiling tolerantly among themselves. Wei Ih-Seng was one of them and she had a kind heart, therefore, allowance must be made for her strange ways of thinking.

During these weeks Ho-ming kept constantly active attending to the lesser details of Wu Nurse's work. The latter was much improved but her absence would continue for another half moon. Wei Ih-Seng had little rest day or night. She worked as hard as any slave; and more and more frequently the fourteen-year-old girl wondered why her patron, with so many opportunities to choose from, should have selected an existence like this.

One morning as she stood in the shop entrance watching the doctor ride off, Ho-ming halted for a moment to glance casually up and down the street which only two years ago had proved such great delight. The sun climbing ever higher into the steely sky concentrated its heat on the flagstone paving. Several doors above, a woman supported and fanned a ten-year-old boy whose arms and legs were not much larger than an infant's — a victim of the Shrinking Disease. Wei Doctor said the cause was poor rice, but that was hard to understand. Rice was rice, and the only problem for most people was to get enough of it.

Across the street a beggar sat offering with outstretched hands a dirty bowl in which remnants of food and small copper coins mixed indiscriminately. At the approach of a passer-by his face and body became distorted with pain but a donation immediately changed this aspect to one of pleasure. A hawk swooped down and perched on a cross-pole which stretched between the roofs of the narrow thoroughfare. Suspended beneath it a cotton banner of advertising swayed with the vibration of the bird's weight. A shop proprietor stepped forward and raised threatening hands. Slowly the bird lifted upward, and the banner, caught in a gusty breeze, moved in the same direction.

Ho-ming's gaze followed curiously. There was a queer light to the sky and her tongue discovered foreign matter on her lips. Grit! With a grimace she spat and then realized that dust was everywhere about her, swirling in great cornucopias up and down the street. Countless tiny motes, separated from the mass, made their ways into shops and courtyards; over spirit-screens and past gaping jaws of small Fu dogs set to guard the cornices; out into the street again, blinding pedestrians and confusing load bearers; down between the cracks of flagstones, adding to dirt buried there for centuries.

For protection she hastened inside. In the work room a fine yellow sediment was gradually covering everything. Catching up a damp cloth she began to wipe the furniture. As though the heat were not enough to bear without this gritty wind!



Wei Doctor returned earlier than expected. Her eyes were inflamed and as she bathed them, she remarked, "Who would have looked for the tail of a Gobi dust storm at this season?"

"Gobi — you mean the desert far to the north of the 'Son of the Sea'?"

The physician blinked dripping lashes, "The same! Beyond the Great River and the provinces north of that and the land still north of them."

"And this sand travels so great a distance?"

"Truly, though seldom here in our Yangtze valley. At Peiping all winter long dust blows like this, and one can never escape it. I wish, however, it had chosen another time to come here — already there is illness enough without help from spreading germs."

Two hours later a formal request for assistance came from the Wen house stating that its mistress needed immediate attention. When the doctor returned from this call, she asked, "Sung Ho-ming, do you think you might do some real nursing today?"

The answer came mischievously, "And shall I prescribe also for the patient?"

"Very saucy you are," her elder chided with pretended fierceness. "This is not a little joke! Wen Mistress was on the street buying silk when the dust blew at its worst. Her eyes — red and sore from trachoma — are badly irritated and in one a piece of grit is embedded. In order to extract this someone must hold the eyelids firmly. The serving women are too dirty and the daughter, so recently come from

Shanghai, told me the very thought of doing it made her ill. Delicate she is, indeed! And yet I heard it said," she continued half to herself, "she was one of a group of students that stoned an official to death."

"What new custom is this — for students to kill officials?" exclaimed her horrified listener.

Wei Ih-Seng ran a hand wearily over her forehead, "They thought he deserved to die. He refused, I believe, to enforce a boycott. Evil officials there are too many to count — but when youthful patriotism takes punishment into its own hands, the good are likely to suffer with the bad." She paused abruptly, "Of late I talk with too much freedom. I become like you, Me-me, a chattering magpie."

"Truly my tongue is overactive; Mother says, 'Words that pour out like water cannot all be good,' " Ho-ming admitted. "But when do we go treat this patient, Honorable One?"

"When do we go treat this patient?" mimicked the physician. "Already the tadpole has become a frog!" With an affectionate expression she added, "Good you are for me, Sung Ho-ming; because of you I laugh often."

Ho-ming said nothing. There were no words to express her feelings, she thought, as she now prepared to take Wu Nurse's place in one of the town's wealthiest homes. At the doctor's orders she placed one object beside another in the familiar black bag. Then after smoothing garments and hair, she scrubbed her hands in water so hot that her fingers retained a parboiled appearance.

On arrival within the Wen gateway, a servant led the way through the main hall of the house to those inner quarters occupied by the women. There in Wen Mistress' presence, Ho-ming conducted herself with a dignity which Lao-Po-Po would have declared flatly impossible — waiting quietly for directions; lifting out the necessary articles as they were called for; steadily holding the eyelids when their owner struggled to pull away. After the piece of grit had been extracted and the eyes treated, the patient inquired, "This maid — who is she?" Wei Doctor explained and the other remarked, "So, a farmer's daughter! Why is she here rather than helping her parents with the soil?"

"Will you not permit even one farm girl, Mistress, to do something else? This one is good at books and of much use to me in the drug shop."

"He must be a wealthy farmer who can afford to send his daughter to school these days." When this bait resulted in no further information, the speaker added, "Study is bad for girls. It is as the sages have taught, 'A little learning unsettles a woman's brain.' That is," suddenly remembering her visitor, "the brains of most women." Swiftly she changed the subject, "Respected Doctor, I would speak with you alone."

"You may wait for me in the garden," Wei Ih-Seng advised her assistant, and with a bow Ho-ming left the room.

Wu Nurse's substitute found her way through corridors into the open space of dwarfed shrubs and rocky landscape. There beside a small, stone pool in which



goldfish swam lazily she halted. So Wen Mistress thought that farmers' daughters should not do books! Why then had she sent her own girl to school? The head of this house, Wen the Money-lender, had made all his silver by charging the poor exorbitant interest on loans. Sung Farmer and the hard-working, more scrupulous members of the community disliked him thoroughly. "And whether or not I do books is it her affair?" Ho-ming demanded indignantly of the garden only to be interrupted by an unfamiliar voice, "And where do you do books?"

Startled, she swung about to confront one of the strangest girls she had ever seen. The latter, instead of the usual plaits, wore hair cut short about her neck. Her jacket of thin, brocaded gauze possessed no collar and lay flat around the throat. Sleeves of twice the usual width hung loose at the elbow, and the matching trousers ended midway between knee and ankle.

"Where do you do books, I asked?"

"At the foreign school just beyond the town," Ho-ming answered slowly, noticing the excessive amount of rouge and rice powder which set off sharp eyes in a discontented face.

"And what do you learn there?" the other questioned in a supercilious tone.

"Everything I am taught," came the cool reply.

As if by magic the petulant expression changed to one of alertness, "That did not sound like one of these stupid country girls! Who are you and why are you in my garden?"

"I am here because your mother wished to speak with Wei Ih-Seng alone."

"So, the woman physician is within and you came with her, is it not so?"

"Does it matter? Why should one so important waste time on my miserable self?"

This time the girl laughed, "What a tongue you have!" she admired. "But I like it; this is the first interesting moment I have had since my return. Always I am homesick for Shanghai — something there was to see or to do every point on the clock. In this place I die," she exclaimed with dramatic solemnity.

"Our town is not too bad!" Ho-ming defended loyally. "For a year and more we have known peace. In that time neither soldiers nor bandits have bothered us."

"Soldiers and bandits would, at least, be exciting. Much fighting goes on at the coast — coolies against their employers; foreigners with our own people. A common sight it was to see men seized and imprisoned. Once I watched while angry mill workers tore their foreman to pieces, and twice," she boasted, "I, myself, assisted in punishing the wicked."

Ho-ming's stomach felt queer. And this one could not help in treating an eye! "What crime had that foreman done?" she managed to ask.

"I no longer remember clearly; too long hours the mill owner made his people work, I think. Anyway, we would not have it. And his representative died, as did one of the officials."

"We?" her listener echoed.

"We — we, the youth of this generation! In Shanghai and in all of the other large cities, students and those of our age work to save this land which our elders have ruined. For hundreds of years evil officials have preyed on the people; the rich have grown richer and the poor, poorer. Have our parents or ancestors done anything to mend matters? No! And today affairs are even worse, for the foreign imperialists increase in numbers and power. Unless we check them soon, we shall have no country of our own!" Enthusiasm faded suddenly from her eyes as Wei Ih-Seng and a servant approached. "There is your doctor," she told Ho-ming moodily. "She thinks I know no custom and she likes me not. Custom!" She snapped a thumb and finger together; "of what use is custom today?"

Although she shared the doctor's ricksha, Ho-ming rode back to the dispensary in silence, her thoughts a disturbing jumble of all she had just heard, and for the remainder of that afternoon she moved mechanically about her duties. The contacts in the foreign school and at the drug shop had led her to consider her own experience much more varied than that of most contemporaries. But today she had met a girl of Mei-li's age who snapped fingers at tradition and boasted of personal activities limited usually to soldiers and criminals.

That night she could not wait to tell her sister. At the end Mei-li reminded, "'Beware of strangers who talk too freely!'"



"True it is that her words stumbled over each other," acknowledged the younger girl, "but so interesting are the things she tells, I could listen all day."

On the succeeding visits to the Wen household, the daughter was always to be found in her mother's room. With one pretext or another she would lead the farm girl aside and immediately resume the discussion of their native land's political and industrial strife. In lighter moments she described gay social events in which young people participated, indiscriminate of age or sex. To Ho-ming, whose whole existence had been colored by warfare and disaster, these last accounts seemed more astonishing than the terrifying ones of student uprisings and law enforcement. Many of the terms used—foreign hotels, moving pictures, dancing—were incomprehensible, and the determination not to ask too many questions succumbed to inquisitiveness.

The explanations left her breathless. Today, here in her native land, youth was in possession of freedom such as its ancestors had never imagined. Girls and women actually appeared in public places and enjoyed entertainment of a type previously limited to fathers and sons of families. She, too, was young and some time might travel and taste these pleasures for herself, even though she had no desire to copy the Wen girl's program completely. Of little use at inciting laborers and stoning officials would they find her.

Surreptitiously she studied her companion during these conversations. In spite of liberty this other was

not happy. Even Mei-li, who had been bound always by tradition, seemed more contented. Her sister's meek acceptance of what the elders deemed best had never been possible for Ho-ming; on the other hand, a faint wave of insecurity swept over her at the idea of breaking, as had the Wen girl, with all that was old and enduring. Disturbed, she pushed the thought back into the recesses of her mind. Then with a smile she requested, "This dancing — what is it like?"

In the corridor the daughter of the house satisfied herself that the occupants of the sick room were engrossed in other matters and exhibited several of Shanghai's most popular steps. Ho-ming, trying clumsily to copy these, burst into laughter.

"And is it so amusing?"

"I was thinking what Lao-Po-Po might say of this."

"These old women!" came the irritable complaint. "But for my grandmother I would not now be here. Three years ago while I was away they betrothed me; now it is time, she says, for marriage. Marriage! Today girls do not marry this one or that one just because their elders have decided so. We select our own husbands and if we do not like them," she paused to watch the effect of this statement on her companion, "then we divorce them!"

"No need is there to visit Wen Mistress today," the physician announced the next morning, "her eyes improve. Between the mother-in-law and daughter that woman (I pity her!) finds life difficult. Preparations are being made for the girl's wedding and the mother

fears if the other family learns of her maid's wild doctrines, they may wish to break the betrothal contract."

With an air of indecision Ho-ming said, "Queer the Wen girl is, indeed. Four times have I talked with her and still I do not know what to think."

Wei Ih-Seng's eyes narrowed. Her lips parted as if to speak, then slowly closed on whatever she had meant to say. Later she stated casually, "Tomorrow Wu Nurse will once more be with us."

"Good!" Ho-ming replied with courtesy, even while a pang of disappointment made itself felt. She was, of course, not sorry about Wu Nurse's recovery, but to have these days of more important duties end was something else again. Also there would be no further opportunity, so far as she could see, to talk with her exciting new acquaintance. Soberly she made her

way through the town toward  
the sunset and the fields  
where lay her home.







## CHAPTER IX

### “IN DEEP WATERS DRAGONS AND CROCODILES BREED”

TO Ho-ming's surprise one afternoon shortly after school reopened, she saw the Wen girl step from a ricksha just outside the foreign gateway.

“Good fortune this is,” the latter called out gaily; then asked, “where do you live?”

On receiving a reply, she alighted from the vehicle, ordered the coolie to follow, and the two maids started down the road. At first Ho-ming said nothing. Pride that a person of such broad experience should choose to walk with her rather than to ride comfortably struggled with the fear that somebody she knew might meet her in the company of one so ridiculously attired.

"You have not asked what I do at the foreign school," prodded the object of this concern. Not waiting for an answer, she went on, "I study music with Miss Bell. She is not so good as the teacher I had in Shanghai, but in this place there is no choice. My father sends to the coast for a foreign piano that I may play it for him."

"Which class will you attend?"

"None! I know too much. A private lesson I shall have each Friday."

"How she boasts!" Ho-ming thought impatiently and changed the subject. "Tell me more of what is to be seen in Shanghai. Are their buildings really as tall as our big tea house? And is it true they have small sliding rooms in which to ride from ground to roof?"

"Like the big tea house?" the other laughed aloud. "Several times that high they are." Her voice lowered condescendingly, "I forget how little you have seen."

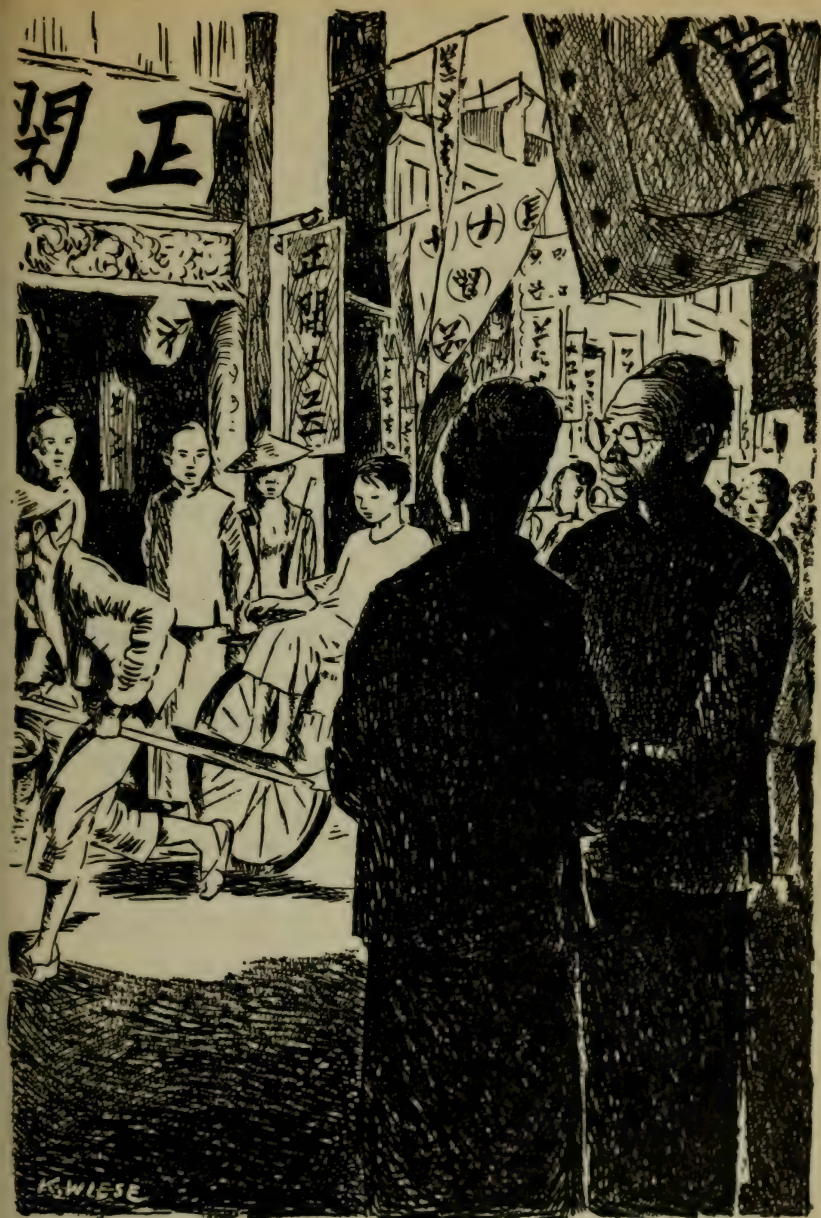
Ho-ming bit her lip in annoyance. With sudden inspiration she retaliated, "I suppose you brought a radio here with you?"

The startled response to this was highly satisfactory. "What do you know of radios?"

"Occasionally I listen to one," Ho-ming replied with a nonchalant air. "I like," she said drawing her brows together in a critical frown, "the programs from Nanking better than those from Shanghai."

"I did not know there was such a machine in this place."





Rapidly this returned student became the town's spiciest subject of conversation



"Once I told you this town is not too bad; when you have been here longer, you will see for yourself."

But her companion was not to be diverted. "Who has this radio?"

"Liu Teacher at the school."

"The next time I go there I shall ask her if I may listen also. These foreigners are pleased to have us make requests of them."

"So far she has invited only a few students to visit her room," Ho-ming pointed out discouragingly. "You told me once or twice that you hated the foreigners — why then ask favors of them?"

"Why not?" shrugged the other, "I wish to hear that machine. Near the coast everyone has a radio — everyone of importance. With many tears I begged my father to buy that or a phonograph rather than the piano, but neither my mother nor grandmother would permit him to do so. A pole on the roof would be certain to anger the Feng-Shui, they said! As for phonographs — at no cost they may be heard in shops! When my brother returns from his latest journey to the north, perhaps he will purchase one or the other, though he may not — his wife is so old-fashioned."

Ho-ming's memory recalled dimly the scene in Li's food shop and the mention of this girl's brother — he who had started to move a spirit-screen and had been punished by a falling tile. So neither of the children in the Wen household trod the paths of their ancestors!

Rapidly this returned student became the town's spiciest subject of conversation, and her father's

debtors found a special delight in the gossip about her. It was common knowledge that negotiations had already been started toward breaking the betrothal contract. The family of the young man in question was respectable and clung to the old ways. If avoidance were possible, the elders under this roof had no intention of receiving as daughter-in-law a girl whose name had been bandied on wagging tongues, and for this privilege of refusal they were willing to forfeit a substantial sum of money. Before their minds would change, they informed Wen the Elder, some very definite assurances of reformed conduct, and it might be some additional gifts as well, would have to be forthcoming. As a result of this decision, the money-lender went about his affairs with a harassed countenance, and Wen Mistress remained in the seclusion of her courts and wept. Only the cause of all the disturbance continued free and untroubled.

"Her father is a fool as well as a villain," Lao-Po-Po said one evening, "permitting her to run about as she pleases when two or three beatings with the bamboo are what she needs. Formerly they would have locked her in a room without food until she changed her habits. But then in the old days she would not first have been sent away to school and spoiled."

Ho-ming, preparing a history assignment for the next morning, paused to listen, but took no part in this conversation. To reveal to Grandmother that she, herself, had talked on a number of occasions with this creature whom the old woman considered utterly

abandoned would be the height of foolishness. Inevitably it would lead to the fact that she had met the Wen girl through work for the woman physician. That Wei Ih-Seng liked the maid no better than did Lao-Po-Po, Ho-ming felt certain, and when she stopped to consider, she could discover no really good reason for continuing on her own part this unusual acquaintance.

The newcomer was not particularly attractive; her moods shifted with the moment; she was forever boasting — indeed, had she possessed some control of her tongue, the townspeople and the family of her betrothed might have learned nothing definite about her wild ideas. But to servants and to tradesmen she had talked as freely as to Ho-ming. Well, the other girl's experiences, her young critic admitted judicially, were something to talk about. Few of the Chinese heroines in history had known more excitement. And as a narrator, she excelled greatly the few story-tellers Ho-ming had found opportunity to hear. Accordingly, the farm maid went to each Friday afternoon's rendezvous at the school gate in a state of mental reservation, over which curious interest ultimately and unfailingly triumphed.

On one of these occasions an oblong envelope slipped from the Wen girl's jacket and fluttered to the ground. Pouncing upon it, the owner tucked it once more within her garment, then explained, "My family wished to open my letters. I had to bribe the post-carrier and our gateman to give the mail first to me.



Everything I do costs me silver; the servants fatten on me as do locusts on green fields," she complained with a sigh, "but without letters I should know nothing of what goes on in the world. The local newspaper contains no information — its space is filled with drug advertisements. I should think your doctor would enjoy reading them," she concluded disagreeably.

"Wei Ih-Seng already knows more about medicines than is to be learned from newspapers; moreover, she is too busy to spend time studying what merchants have to sell."

"Now your temper is fired," came tauntingly. "Always it is thus when I mention your 'honey-friend.'"

Ho-ming's eyes snapped. "And why not? Except for the Honorable Physician, I should never have done books. Also does anyone else in this town work so hard to help others and for such small return? To the poor she says, 'This is but a little thing, waste no breath thanking me!' Even of the rich she does not ask much for her treatments. Would not the old druggist have charged your mother more, and is it likely her eyes would have improved so fast?"

"Suit yourself! suit yourself! I do not wish to tear skin over the matter. But your doctor probably has some other reason for her good deeds. She is foreign-trained, and I, who know a thing or two, distrust all such."

"Were not your teachers in Shanghai the same?"

"Some of them, but was that their fault?" the Wen girl veered with usual inconsistency. "Only of late

years have we realized how black are the foreigners' hearts. But it will not be long now! We act surely, and when they least expect trouble — there it is! First they shall go from the country districts, and then ——" for once she seemed conscious of having said too much. Without another word she motioned to her runner, stepped into the ricksha, and, waving a farewell, was gone.

Ho-ming looked after the departing vehicle. Not again would she waste good minutes on this one with her foolish talk — railing at the people from across the sea and at the same time studying music in one of their schools. True Li Principal and most of the teachers were Chinese, but it was said that Americans contributed largely toward expenses. And Miss Bell and her compatriot each worked as hard as anyone on the faculty. Doubtless there were many evil foreigners, she herself could not say — her contacts with the outsiders had been limited. But those she knew were pleasant enough; even Miss Llewellyn had proved nicer than expected. As for Wei Ih-Seng, she was no foreigner but a Chinese of the Chinese. Ai! Ho-ming's heart grew hot every time the Wen girl mentioned that name.

And then suddenly the money-lender and his family sank into temporary obscurity as a threatening cloud grew larger on the horizon. For two years this particular district had been required to face, aside from heavily levied taxes, only the inevitable evils of disease, pest, and drought. None of these had been unendurable.

More people than usual had not died; locusts and worms had been fought and overcome; in time rain had brought life again to a parched earth. But now from various quarters there arrived rumors of attacks on property made by neither bandits nor looting soldiers. In this instance the aggressors were said to be young; they wore uniform of a sort; and wherever they appeared, they harangued the citizens on social and economic problems. Their demand was for an equal distribution of land and labor, and their chief objects of denunciation, the national government and the foreign imperialists.

Surprisingly enough, young women as well as men comprised these groups. In the first towns through which they marched, the inhabitants had been divided between scorn and amusement for maids who had so entirely forgotten all propriety. Merchants and householders alike, fearless of results, had flung taunting epithets at the youths and their bobbed-haired, short-skirted companions. They had lived to regret facetious criticism. In most cases revenge had been swift and certain; shops were dismantled and their proprietors beaten or killed. Such retaliation for loss of face could be understood; what was more puzzling was the punishment invariably meted out to the foreigners in each community, who had usually given expression to no comment whatever.

In a brief period these roving bands had grown in numbers and in power. Visits from them were now anticipated with dread and received in unprotesting



silence. When no opposition was offered, the victims were confined, for the most part, to the prosperous and the foreigners, but against these two classes hostilities were mercilessly waged. Wealthy landholders and merchants were deprived of all possessions; more bitterly still their sons and daughters were taken prisoner and forced into the ranks of those who had ruined them. And what seemed strangest of all to the older generation was that these captives, exposed to the grim but nonetheless fascinating enthusiasm of marching comrades, became in time devoted adherents to the new cause.

Few of the average citizens understood this movement. Through the centuries secret societies had for one reason or another organized and developed. Some of these, like this latest one, had talked patriotically of "the people and their rights"; others had offered no such worthy excuse for their activities, but in either case the people had suffered just the same. Many were still alive who could recall the Taiping rebellion. "Apostles of Great Peace" these had styled themselves, and as a result of their zeal, so many law-abiding citizens had perished that the waters of the Great River itself had run with blood.

"This movement, then, is doubtless like all the others," townsmen and villagers agreed, "and in time — may the gods be merciful — it too will pass."

Ho-ming, giving only partial attention to a discussion of this subject one evening in her own home, was not greatly concerned. In her mind she recognized a

similarity between the activities of this movement and those in which the Wen girl had participated at the coast. But so far the organization was still engaged in the adjoining district, and while the distance between was not great, her own town had neither foreign business concerns nor men of marked wealth to invite attack.

For the time the preparation of lessons seemed of much greater importance. In school she had continued to advance, and each moon studies grew more complex. That the faculty was pleased with her progress she was quite aware. Even Li Principal had troubled to compliment her on effort. The old classics teacher was sparing of flattery; he evinced his interest, however, by demanding more of her than of the other students in the class.

"Glad am I that he does not punish me with so much work," Hwei-chih remarked once at recess. "It does not pay to let some teachers know how bright you are."

Ho-ming smiled faintly. That morning on an errand to the school office she had surprised Li Principal and Miss Llewellyn deep in conversation. "Wei Ih-Seng," she heard the former say, "thinks this girl may do well as a doctor. If conditions settle and travel becomes safe, she will send her next to the boarding school in Nanking and then, perhaps, to the woman's college in that city. Though with all of this trouble increasing daily, who can say what schools will be left?" An abrupt silence ensued as the two women became conscious of Ho-ming's presence, then Miss

Llewellyn, still unchanged in moments of embarrassment, laughed nervously.

Automatically the involuntary eavesdropper had trod the hall to her classroom, hugging this news to her heart. Wei Ih-Seng was planning to send her, Sung Ho-ming — no other — away to school! Wei Ih-Seng — Nanking — the woman's college — the words sang themselves over and over in her mind.

The New Year came and went without change, and Miss Llewellyn, due to return to America, continued where she was. "Is Gray Teacher ill that she does not come back?" Ho-ming asked one day at the dispensary.

Wei Ih-Seng's brows drew together in a frown as she countered, "Is Miss Llewellyn not a good teacher?"

"Good — yes! But the year of absence is ended."

The doctor seemed unwilling to discuss the subject further, and her assistant asked no more questions, even while she made a note in her own mind to solve as soon as possible the motive for this silence.

A few weeks later Ho-ming walked into her home one afternoon to find Lao-Po-Po and Mother flushed with excitement. Entering the inner room to change her garments, she discovered Mei-li stretched on the bed, crying without restraint. "What is the matter, Je-je," the younger girl asked in surprise, "are you ill?"

No answer was forthcoming, and Ho-ming perched on the bed frame and began to pat the heaving shoulders. Gradually her sister quieted. Between sobs she managed to reply, "They arrange for my marriage!"



"Ai-ya! Who told you?"

"This morning the go-between came from that family; they wish it to be at once."

"At once!" the younger girl repeated critically. "Is it custom to hurry important affairs in this fashion?"

"Recently in that house the mother died. No one remains but the father and three sons. They need a woman that no time may be lost at their work."

"For a little they could hire and feed some old woman to help them."

Mei-li sat up and dabbed at her tear-stained face with a sleeve. "So Mother thought, but Lao-Po-Po said that my place was there when they needed me."

Ho-ming looked at the other and tried to imagine what life would be like without her in the house. Then struggling to control her own feelings, she comforted, "Think, Je-je, you will be the one woman under the roof, and by the time the two younger sons bring home their brides you can order them about as would any mother-in-law, 'Do this for me! Give that to the hogs! Clean that rice carefully, Slave!'"

Humor lightened Mei-li's expression, and her sister went on, "In a moon you will return to visit us. Also, are you not glad that I taught you to read a little? Often I will write that you do not become homesick. And now I must find something beautiful for you to take with you."

This last sentence was unfortunate, for Mei-li burst again into tears, "I cannot bear to go," she wailed, "I am a home creature and there all will be strange!"

With a philosophy she was far from feeling, Ho-ming reminded, "When a few months have passed, you will be as accustomed to your new home as you now are to this."

Later as she sorted the articles which Wei Ih-Seng had donated from time to time, she told herself that this affair was not to her liking. Even though the need was great, there was something unseemly about such haste. Her parents, it was evident, were none too pleased; only Grandmother with her incessant talk of weddings went about with a satisfied air.

Carefully Ho-ming made her choice from the collection before her: one colored face cloth, a pink tube of toothpaste, a flowered can of talcum powder, and a sample bottle containing violet perfume. These were the favorites among her possessions, and Mei-li should have them all. There was unfortunately no bar of purple soap like that which her sister had once desired. If only she had a little money with which to buy some larger gift!

On the following Saturday the doctor asked, "Now that your sister 'goes through the gate' what will you do?"

"Rise earlier in the morning and go to sleep later at night, my mother decides. She thinks she can manage in that fashion. Also they seek a wife for my brother. A good worker she will be if Lao-Po-Po selects her, but as for appearance or cleverness ——" with an expressive gesture she left the rest of this thought to her listener's imagination.

"Does your grandmother say nothing about your own future?"

Ho-ming glanced up with confidence. "Nothing! Thanks to the Honorable Physician, my parents are willing for me to do books."

Shortly afterwards Wei Ih-Seng displayed a box of wools. "These," she said looking them over, "I brought to this place with me that I might work with them in free hours." Her mouth puckered in wry humor, "I was mistaken! And if I keep them another summer," she added, "they will be devoured by moths. Sung Ho-ming, how well do you knit?"

"Not so well as the other women in my house, but enough!"

The doctor held out several balls of soft turquoise blue, "Do me the favor of taking these home. If you do not wish them for yourself, perhaps your sister might like a scarf of this color."

"Moths!" Ho-ming exclaimed when she showed the wool to Mei-li, "Can you find any moths in this? An excuse she wished for her kindness — always is it that way. Now I begin to knit a scarf for you and this time no single stitch will I forget to count."

Half a moon later Mei-li, properly chaperoned, had departed. Ho-ming watched while coolies swung off with the bride's boxes of clothes and bedding. Ordinarily the lids of these would have remained open that their contents might be displayed to the interested and curious in the streets, but in this case the journey was to be for some distance over rough country roads, and



in protection fastenings were closed, then sealed with red paper strips on which were written large characters of ownership. There was a sputtering of small fire-crackers, and Mei-li, decked in the stiff, wedding robe and ornate headgear which was customary, stepped into the gay-colored chair which would carry her to the new home. The younger girl, dry-eyed but heavy-hearted, waited until this small procession had wound down the road and over the brow of the first hill, then turned toward the house. Two things there were of comfort in this moment of loss — one that no older woman ruled in that other farmhouse; and, secondly, that recent death there would relieve the bride of much wearying and unpleasant ceremony connected with a normal marriage feast.

In the succeeding weeks the household was unusually quiet. Mother went about with reddened eyes but she made no verbal complaints. Once or twice Ho-ming wrote brief notes, using only the simplest characters to express her meaning. These epistles were limited also in content, for until Mei-li told them with her own lips something more about the family of which she was now a member, her sister did not dare to be frank. One could never tell how the strange household would receive written communication; they might resent the newcomer's ability to read and cherish it against her.

Then suddenly the first moon was at a close and the bride returned in person to reassure those who loved her. The new family, she informed them, was kind in every way, but that they had needed a woman was

certain. "Though the mother was not ill long, you should have seen what the menfolk had already done to that place!" the visitor exclaimed in housewifely horror. "But affairs are better now. Some nice pieces of pottery and brass there are, as well as several very good chests."

"What is important," Lao-Po-Po told her, "is whether there is anything to put in the boxes."

"A number of good comforts there were, but most of them dirty and some torn. Sickness!" Mei-li offered in explanation. "When I spoke of covering the worst, the head of the house gave me silver to buy material for three of them. I beat the cotton afresh and made them over. The cloth is stout and will last. Moreover, if crops are plentiful, I shall have money for the others, I am told. You should see their fowls," she continued enthusiastically.

Ho-ming listened mouth agape. Never in all of her life had Mei-li talked at such length. No doubt was there now that the former fears for her happiness had been groundless. A wave of affectionate pride swept over the younger girl. This was as it should be — her sister was a treasure for any family to have.

A day or so after the bride's second departure, Lao-Po-Po sickened again and this time there was no pretense about the affair. For a week Mother attempted the impossible task of nursing and of caring for the endless demands which early spring made on any farm wife. "Tomorrow," she told Ho-ming in despair one evening, "you will have to remain here and help."

Her daughter's heart sank like a stone in deep water, and she stood wordless trying to adjust herself to the blow. With worried expression Mother watched. "I wish there were no need for this," she said, "but what else can we do?"

Ho-ming managed a smile. "Already you have worked too long alone, and even though I am absent from school several days, it will not matter greatly. In spare moments I can study very hard, and when I return, I shall know almost as much as the others."

At this period Grandmother was too ill to scold, but her condition demanded constant attention. Ho-ming found herself slipping naturally into the routine of nursing. She recalled one after another methods observed at the dispensary and put them into service.

"Since you enjoy this more than the housework and I the housework more than this, each shall do what she likes," Mother said one morning.

"Truly I prefer the nursing," Ho-ming acknowledged, "but if Lao-Po-Po would see Wei Ih-Seng only once, there might be need for none of it."

"That your grandmother would not consider."

"Much of the time she knows little of what goes on," persisted her daughter. "Why then can we not invite the Honorable Physician to look at her?"

Mother shook her head in denial. "That very moment the Old One might be clear of mind and if she saw your doctor, anger would doubtless kill her."

"But this way she may die also. That medicine she eats from the old druggist is bad, I know," Ho-ming



said with tears of frustration in her voice as she walked away. The days had already passed into weeks and the weeks into the greater part of a moon. Hourly the fear grew in her that she had lost too much time for advancing with her class to a higher grade. No spare minutes had there been for the outside study she had planned, and so long as Grandmother continued in this state, there would be none in the near future.

"Your doctor is in trouble," Yuen-san told his sister one evening, "they were talking about it in the fields."

Ho-ming grew chill. "What affair is this?"

"She was invited to look at the Li child after its grandmother had already sent for the priests. When Wei Ih-Seng appeared, the others refused to go ahead with the service. So the woman-healer gave the infant medicine and immediately left."

"Then what?"

"The child died."

"And I suppose it would surely have lived but for the physician!"

"Do not waste your temper on me," her brother said calmly. "At the temple their hearts are bitter toward her; she has, of course, robbed them of income. Also two other children whom she treated lately have died."

"Because their mothers feed them what the doctor warns will cause death! Stupid they are and when the child perishes from green cucumbers or too many bean

sprouts, the foreign medicine is blamed. Even so, more babies live than formerly."

"That may be true, but people will not wish to remember it now."

"Is it important they should?"

"Suit yourself! Much talk there is in the town against the woman physician. Some, whether priests or others I do not know, lose no chance to point out her mistakes and to criticize her teachings." He grinned suddenly, "That some of them are foolish even you must believe, though I do not expect you to say so."

As he passed through the doorway, Ho-ming's eyes lighted. Today he was more like the Yuen-san of a few years ago. Custom it was for brothers and sisters to grow apart after they were small. She drew a deep breath: there were advantages certainly in a life such as the Wen girl had attributed to Shanghai.

But these thoughts faded before the more important one that Wei Ih-Seng was in difficulty, and she, Sung Ho-ming, was tied to Lao-Po-Po's bedside. Constantly she carried this new worry about with her, and from it there was no escape. Several days later when Yuen-san returned from the field, he asked, "Does your doctor have some bitter enemy other than the priests?"

Ho-ming looked at him wonderingly. "None that I know."

Her brother considered this. "Strange it is, indeed. Li Merchant, whose child died, has too much sense to

send foolish letters, and the priests are not likely to use that method."

"Letters?"

"The same — ordering the physician to leave this town. Today her assistant went home to the paper shop. She told everyone that she was afraid to stay longer at the dispensary."

Ho-ming's world was whirling about her. Wu Nurse was afraid and had left Wei Ih-Seng alone. What of the manservant and the ricksha runner — had they gone also?

Yuen-san's voice went on, "This morning Lin Farmer said that no virtuous woman would keep a public drug shop. You should have heard our father — ai-ya! 'The Honorable Doctor has been a friend to one in my household,' he said angrily, 'and I will not hear such speech! Many others in this town has she helped, also — is it custom for men of the Middle Kingdom to forget favors so easily?' With that he spat on the ground, then began to hoe harder than ever. After that no more was said."

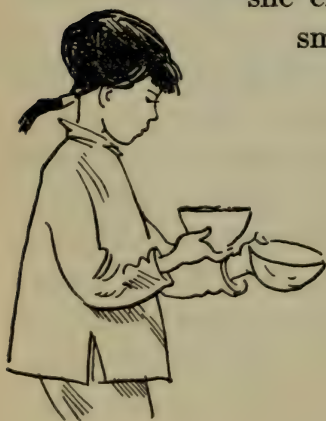
How she managed to care properly for Grandmother that evening, Ho-ming never knew. Her mind was obsessed with this latest terrifying word: Wei Ih-Seng ordered to leave the town — Wei Ih-Seng whose life was spent in fighting disease. Hardly a family in the community but had called in emergency on the woman doctor and many were still alive who, except for her skill, might now be inhabiting the spirit world. Was it possible, as Yuen-san had said, that people would

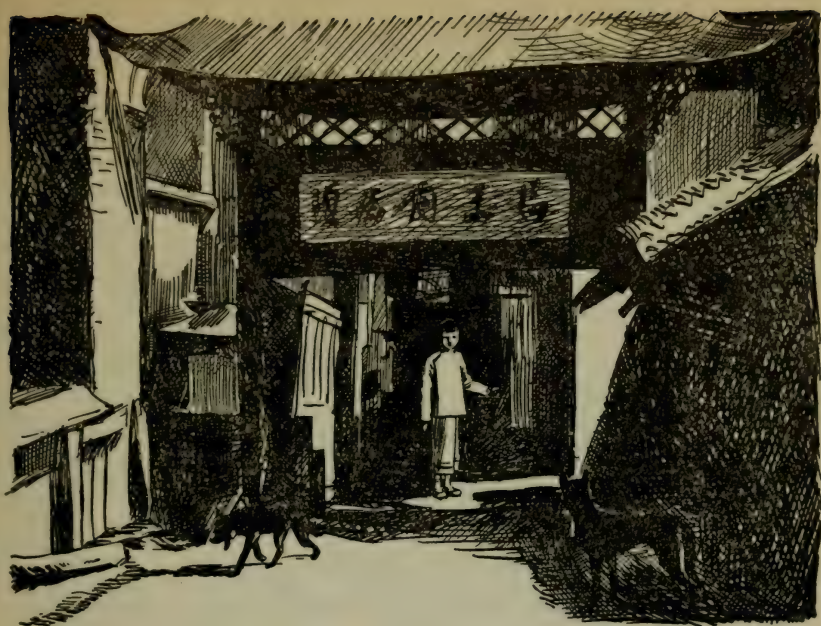


not now wish to recall these deeds? In a good many homes the temple influence was powerful, and the fact that three babies, all Wei Ih-Seng's patients, had died so closely together would supply the priests with sufficient excuse for driving their competitor from the town. And Yuen-san had thought the doctor might have other enemies as well as these. Few people went through life without enmity of one sort or another. From the beginning, the money-lender's daughter had disliked the woman physician and she was quite capable of writing ugly letters. On second thought, this suspicion seemed groundless — one girl, alone, would hardly dare to attempt so much. More disturbing was the thought that friends had not already risen to Wei Ih-Seng's defense. Even Wu Nurse, whose peculiar duty it was to remain in this hour at the doctor's side, had run home to the paper shop for safety.

Ho-ming's lip curled at the thought of the latter.

With a final glance at Grandmother, she extinguished the light from the small bean-oil wick and, throwing herself on her pallet, fell into a fitful sleep.





## CHAPTER X

“NOW DO I EAT BITTERNESS INDEED!”

SHE awoke a number of hours later, jumped up at once to see what her patient wished, and was surprised to find the old woman quiet in slumber. Drowsily Ho-ming rubbed her eyes and wondered what had awakened her. Without loss of time consciousness picked up the worry which it had been temporarily hiding for this moment and presented it again to the maid's attention. Wei Ih-Seng had been ordered to leave the town! Wei Ih-Seng — Wei Ih-Seng — the words stumbled over each other, and in desperation Ho-ming sank down once more on her bed. Her eyes, in no way concerned with this emotional problem, informed her that dawn was not very far away.

Tormented by fears for the doctor's safety, she turned restlessly from side to side. If she could only know what might have happened — what might be happening at this moment. Suppose the two servants had fled like Wu Nurse, how, then, could the physician, one woman alone, secure protection against danger?

In an effort to find peace, she promised herself that this very morning she would beg permission to go to the drug shop and inquire. And that request, wisdom told her in advance, would not be granted. Grateful though her parents were, they would not let their daughter run straight into trouble, could it be prevented. She glanced again at Grandmother. The dispensary was only a few minutes' walk distant, and with all in the house asleep, it would be quite simple to go there and return before anyone was aware. Quite simple — save for the fact that she was a Chinese maid and to go on the street at this hour of the night was not even to be considered. But certainly she could not endure her present state of mind much longer.

With sudden determination she rose, slipped on shoes and outer garments, and crept softly toward the door. As she unbarred the fastening, her father's voice called out sleepily, "Who is there?"

His wife, familiar with sounds from the sick room, answered, "Lay down your heart! Our daughter cares for the Old One." Silence followed.

Ho-ming waited breathlessly, then crossed the threshold. A neighbor's dog rose bristling to its feet but with the first word of whispered command sank again to



rest. Her heart was choking her with its beat. Though the darkness each moment was becoming less intense, there were no signs of the activity which would be ushered in with daylight. Suddenly the whole adventure seemed absurd. What of the other dogs on the way who would not recognize her voice? What of night watchmen set to guard against prowling figures? What of her own punishment should she be discovered in so indiscreet a venture? And to what purpose? To arrive at the dispensary and doubtless find it safely barred for the night!

Once more she took a step but this time in the direction of her own door. Simply to satisfy her foolish imaginings the risk was much too great. And did imagination wake you from sound sleep? something within her asked. Torn by indecision, she stood swaying in the quiet gray of waning night. Were she a boy, there would be none of these problems to frighten. But Wei Ih-Seng was a woman; she had been warned to leave town and had been deserted by her assistant; yet she stayed. How had she dared? "Fear," the doctor's voice seemed to be saying again clearly, "fear, Me-me, is worse than any plague!" With a sob in her throat Ho-ming swung about and was on her way.

Whether the lightening sky freed watchmen and dogs of further obligation to guard, she did not know, but none bothered her, and she arrived at the dispensary without other mishap. As previously feared, the wooden front was closed, and she stood before it and

wondered what to do next. While she debated, the sound of footsteps within reached her ears. She knocked softly on the paneling. At once silence descended. A second time she rapped and again there was no response. Then placing her lips against a crack in the boards, she whispered, "Wei Ih-Seng! Wei Ih-Seng! Wei Ih-Seng!"

Immediately from the opposite side of the barrier a muffled voice demanded, "What do you wish?"

Frightened, Ho-ming stepped back from curb to street. A panel slid open for an inch or so and in this narrow frame appeared the manservant's face. Recognizing the girlish figure, he enlarged the opening and beckoned. "The gods be praised!" came in relieved exclamation, "it may be you are in time!"

With one glance at the speaker on whose cheek a long red scar trickled blood, the maid followed him into the shop. There she sucked in her breath. The wooden shelves had been stripped of supplies; broken bottles and jars lay in fragments on the floor, and stains of varicolored liquid drugs spattered the clean white-washed walls. In dismay she paused to study the scene, but the servant already in the rear room called gruffly, "Hurry — hurry a little!"

On the cot where so many patients had been treated in the past lay Wei Doctor gray and motionless. For a second Ho-ming shrank away in horror, then she leaned over, reached for a wrist and with shaking fingers did what she had seen the physician herself do on countless occasions — search for the pulse. A faint

beat met her pressure. "She lives! Open that window, then bring me cold water and a cloth!" Catching up a fan she put it into service and wondered frantically, "Now what must I do? Now what must I do?" Her mind was a jumble of half-digested observations. "Ai!" she exclaimed as the servant reappeared, "That bottle which makes you cry and cough when you smell it — bring that here!"

"Broken it was with the others!"

"The black bag — did they ruin that also? Always there is some in it."

In another moment ammonia had been measured into water, and Ho-ming endeavored to force the liquid between the purple lips. "Wei Ih-Seng!" she pleaded with her heart in her throat, "drink this for me, drink this for me!"

Most of the drug spilled, but fumes from the extra-strong dose choked the patient into gradual consciousness and a groan. Slowly a more natural color replaced the gray of her countenance. She swallowed. After a little the eyelids began to flutter and the doctor looked out on a hazy world. When she could manage speech, she asked weakly, "What happened?"

"The Mistress was hurt; I carried her here," the servant replied.

For some time the physician did not speak again, then it was to say, "Now I know. I woke to the sound of voices and scuffling. I called to you, but there was no answer." She paused, trying to remember clearly, then resumed, "The coolie screamed and I went to see.



As I entered the other room, something hit me; after that I knew nothing."

"A wall-shelf it was which had been damaged and had loosened itself just before the Mistress appeared! At sight of the Honorable Healer those whom we had not already scared off, ran. I stopped to bar the front securely, and when I turned, Wei Ih-Seng lay on the floor and beside her the broken board." He heaved a great sigh. "Of a certainty I thought death had found us."

"But what happened to the coolie?"

"A flying bottle cut his head. In return he almost killed two of our enemies. Large sums they will have to pay the old druggist for ointments," he remarked with grim humor. "At present the runner rests in his own room nursing his wound."

The doctor attempted to sit up. "More of your ammonia I will have, Sung Ho-ming," she said catching at her head, and prescribing correct dosage. After this had been swallowed, she turned again to the servant, "One thing I do not yet know — how did they gain entrance to the shop?"

"There was a knock at the front. As usual I went to answer. 'Who is there?' I asked.

" 'I come from the Lu house in the lane to the west of the ya-men.'"

"No 'Lu' could I remember on that street, but I was sleepy and are there not ten or more Lu families in this town? 'What is your business?' I wished to know.

"Our oldest son lies ill with a fever; my wife wishes the Honorable Physician to look at him."

"Tomorrow morning she will come," I promised.

"Ai-ya — and in the meantime my son dies!"

"Then you will have to wait a little — Wei Ih-Seng sleeps."

"May I not come in the shop? A dog sniffs at my ankles and I fear his teeth."

"Foolishly I slid back a panel and with that they were on me — eight or it may be nine. Before them I went down. Into the shop they rushed and worked like demons destroying everything on which they could lay hands. There was no light save a small foreign torch which one carried in his hand and I did not recognize their voices. I crawled to my feet, seized that stout bamboo pole which stands always in the corner next the door and began to use it. By that time the coolie had joined me. The rest the Mistress knows."

"But why are you here, Sung Ho-ming?" asked the doctor curiously.

The manservant bowed and left the room. Day-break had arrived, and Ho-ming could hear him muttering to himself over the wreckage of the establishment. "Truly I do not know," she admitted candidly, then looked away as embarrassment grew within her. "Last night my brother told me of Wei Ih-Seng's trouble. I woke in the Hour of the Tiger this morning; sleep would not come to me again. I came here and knocked."

The physician closed her eyes. Later she said with a catch in her voice, "In time of trouble friends are worth more than flawless jade!" A pause succeeded this. "Certainly your parents did not give you permission to come on the street at that hour. And if not, what explanation will you offer?"

"That I have not yet decided," Ho-ming replied, and added, "there was no help for it."

"When my own head aches less and I have treated the wounds of the servants, the runner shall take us to your home."

"With that kindness done where will the Honorable Doctor go for future safety?"

Wei Ih-Seng smiled, "I stay here, Me-me. Is there not plenty of work to do?" she asked ruefully waving a hand toward the shop.

"What if they return a second time?"

"That is not likely. Though much damage was achieved, few in number they were and easily frightened — did not two servants chase them away? But for a little those who need drugs most may have to do without them."

True to the latter's predictions, the dispensary was not again attacked. While no clues were furnished as to the identity of the marauders, many of the townspeople expressed openly their disapproval of such needless destruction. The doctor, with typical foresight, did not press the matter in any way. Instead, she set about salvaging what remained unharmed, and by the end of a week, the store possessed fresh walls and its



usual neat appearance. Surprisingly enough, gifts of money now found their way into the cash box; drugs were replenished, and the business of healing went on much the same as it had before. Rumor to the doctor's discredit faded into the background, and if the priests or others still had a grievance, they decided probably that this was not the wisest time in which to give it expression.

After the first excitement of their daughter's disappearance and her return with the physician as mediator, the Sung family settled down to ordinary routine. On that visit Ho-ming had persuaded the doctor to look at Lao-Po-Po, and as a result she resumed with fresh confidence the business of nursing the old woman.

One morning Grandmother's temperature was gone and she lay quietly on the bed, her sharp eyes following the maid's figure as it moved about the sick room. With the return of strength she asked, "Where is my son's wife?"

"Ai, but you scared me!" came Ho-ming's startled response; "Mother works without."

"How long have you been here?"

"Since a few days after you became ill."

"So my daughter-in-law cares that little she trusts me to an ignorant girl," Grandmother stated with habitual rancor. "And you no longer do books!"

Before a reply came to this, the patient fell asleep. Awaking she called for food. "At this business you are not too bad," she complimented when the last of the

rice gruel disappeared. Then for the second time she remarked, "And you no longer do books! Why not?"

Her granddaughter gestured with a hand. "Spring it is — young pigs, setting hens, silkworms; grain and roots to be sorted; food to be prepared — could one person do all of that and nurse illness as well?"

"Your tongue does not improve, certainly! But then no more did mine — no more did mine!" cackled Lao-Po-Po weakly. "Now since you have tried books and failed, we must arrange a marriage for you."

"Pardon me, Grandmother, I did not fail at school," Ho-ming retorted with rising anger. "I led my classes; moreover Wei Ih-Seng wishes me also to become a physician." As soon as this last sentence escaped her lips, she regretted it.

Strangely enough the old woman gave no sign of having heard, and Ho-ming carried away the empty bowl. When she returned, the patient ordered, "Tell my son's wife to come here. I wish to speak to her alone."

For a half hour Mother remained in the sick room. When she finally reappeared, it was to say, "In three days you return to school. Your grandmother wills it so. She assures me no further nursing will be needed, and that your time must not be wasted."

Ho-ming's jaw sagged and her elder nodded, "That way I feel also. Great change her sickness must have wrought. She says that you are the only one in this family with a brain like hers, and that if I had eyes to see, I would not rob you of your chance at learning."

In another second both had burst into laughter. When this was over, Ho-ming exclaimed with typical candor, "Why do you not laugh more often, Respected Parent — when you do so, your face is very good to look at."

Red stained Mother's cheeks and she replied gruffly, "What foolishness will you next say?"

On the appointed day Ho-ming made her way across the fields to the familiar gate. For more than a half moon she was kept busy every minute catching up on lost work, and then, once again on a fairly secure footing, she found time to participate in the life around her. During her absence the boarding students, for no reason that she could see, had been returned to their own country villages, and the vague air of disquiet which had been growing all spring in the town now seemed to hang over the school as well. Li Principal and the Chinese teachers went about lost in thought and the faces of the two Americans on the faculty wore constantly sober expressions. That something was wrong most of the students sensed; further than that they knew nothing.

One afternoon Ho-ming, who had remained to clean blackboards for Miss Llewellyn, turned to find that young woman's gaze upon her. "Were there electricity in the town as well as in the school, Sung Ho-ming, I would give my radio to you when I leave; though it may be the possession of it would only heap trouble on your head."

"Most unworthy am I of your thought, Liu Hsien-Seng, but when do you leave?"



Miss Llewellyn bit her lip, then hastily breached the gap, "Longer than one year have I stayed here."

Her student walked home slowly. Something more than could be seen on the surface there was to this. Why should the gift of a radio bring trouble on the recipient's head? Why should Miss Llewellyn talk now of leaving? Not yet had the reason for Miss Gray's continued absence been solved. Abruptly Ho-ming dismissed the matter. So often imagination led her far afield! What more natural than for Liu Teacher to mean the end of the school term?

On the following Friday the Wen girl waited outside the gate. "Where have you been so many weeks?" she inquired after a brief greeting.

"For almost a moon here in the school each day; before that my Grandmother was ill, and I helped to nurse her."

"I heard that you also saved the woman physician's life when her place was ruined."

"Truth repeated by gossips stretches beyond all measurement — the Honorable Doctor was but stunned from a blow. Also her store was not ruined — more drugs there are on the shelves than ever." She stopped suddenly and stared through the gate into the compound, "Why do the servants move Miss Bell's furniture at this time?"

"How should I know?" the money-lender's daughter replied indifferently, but her eyes held a peculiar light.

Ho-ming, interested in the moving, failed to notice this and continued with brows drawn together in a

frown, "They carry her things to the cellar under the classrooms. For what reason would Bell Teacher wish them placed there?"

"Who is wise enough to explain the whims of foreigners? Perhaps they fear thieves. Though with so strong a gate and with broken glass all along the wall copings, robbers would find this building difficult to enter."

"Under the great mulberry there is no broken glass on the coping," Ho-ming said half to herself. "Once when I was much younger, I stripped leaves from the tree for my silkworms and I noticed that. Aided by the branches thieves could easily climb over the wall in that spot. Some day," she promised with decision, "I will tell Li Principal of it."

"That you must do, truly," agreed the Wen girl, suppressing a smile and turning away — "They wait for me at home!" she remarked, and stepped into her ricksha.

Ho-ming took the shorter path through the fields. Miss Llewellyn talking of departure and Miss Bell's personal possessions transferred to the cellar! If only she might discuss the matter with Wei Ih-Seng, though how much information might result from this was a problem. There were times when the physician was most unsatisfactory about answering questions.

At evening rice she asked, "Do the townspeople fear trouble from soldiers or bandits?"

"Not from soldiers or bandits," her father replied enigmatically, then changed the subject to one of crops.

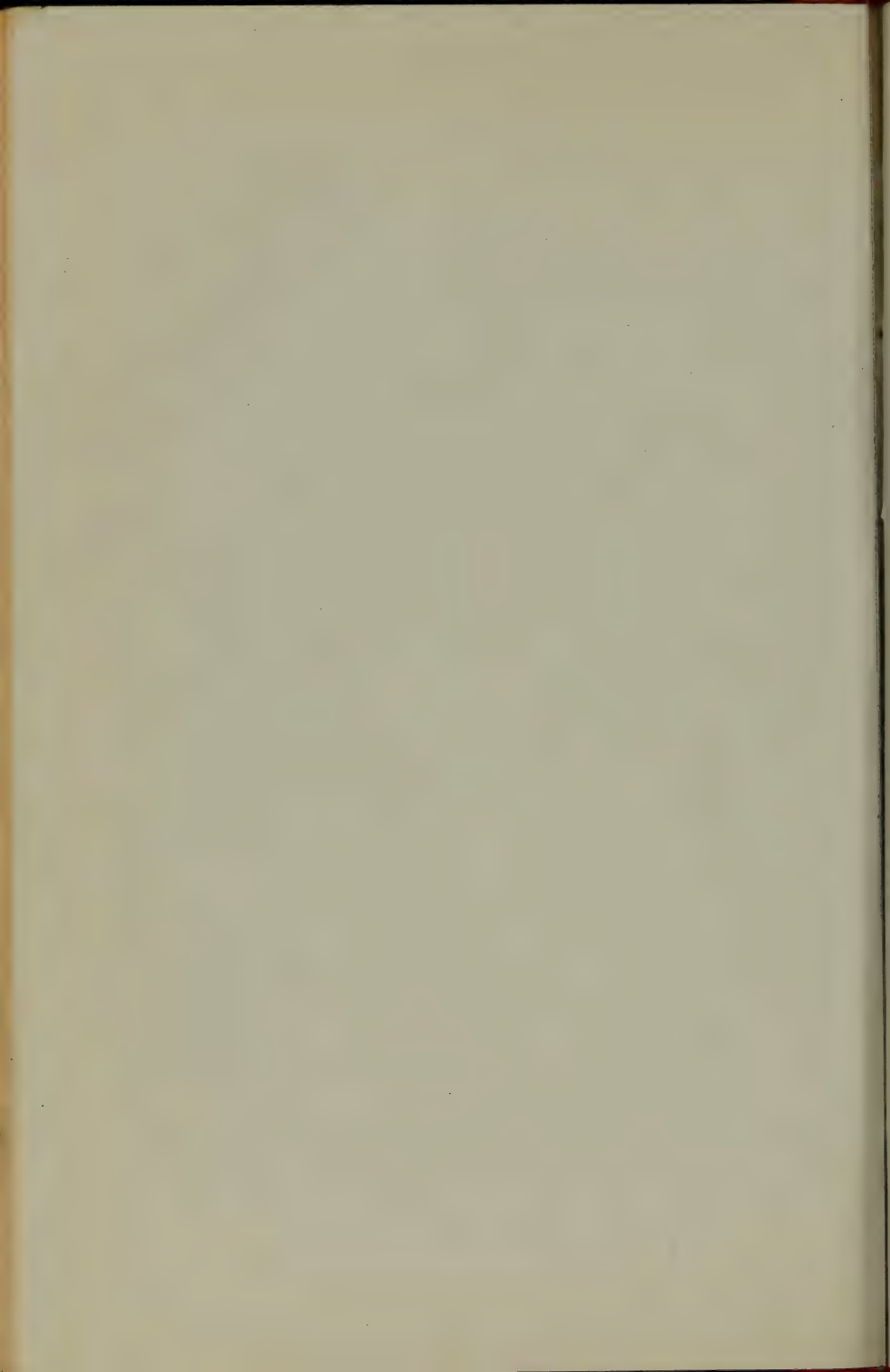
Several mornings later Ho-ming woke to find her family and the neighbors gathered in the street. Dressing hastily, she joined the others. In the center of the group stood Lu Gardener breathlessly relating news. He had, it seemed, arisen at dawn, according to his custom, and started for work at the foreign school. On arrival there he had found that which made his heart miss several beats. "Kneeling on the flagstones in the gateway, Li Principal and the two Chinese women teachers, their garments torn and disheveled, bent over the still figure of the watchman. At that very moment, Wei Ih-Seng rode up in her ricksha, alighted, and carefully examined the man's body. After a little she looked up very soberly and said, 'Already he has been dead for several hours.' Then she asked, 'How did this happen?'

"Li Principal was like one without ears. She stood staring down at the watchman and one of the other teachers answered for her. 'As we had been warned to expect! In the middle of the night they came; how many there were or how they entered the compound no one knows. It was, however, not through the gate. The first I heard was the sound of running feet and yells demanding the two foreign women. By this time the servants were awake; they caught up what weapons they could for defense. I saw the cook strike one of them with the fire tongs and then I hid in the kitchen cupboard. I alone escaped injury of any sort. Li Principal and Jung Hsien-Seng — the Doctor can see for herself — have bruises and cuts,





In the center of the group stood Lu Gardener breathlessly  
relating news



as do the servants. The watchman has paid in this fashion.'

"Miss Bell lies in her room sick from a beating. They left her for dead. As for Miss Llewellyn,' she stopped, drew a deep breath then went on, 'that one has not yet been found. The servants now search the countryside for her.'"

"Ai-ya!" came from Lu's listeners. "And what then?"

"Is that not enough?" the gardener replied. "When I would have listened for more, Li Principal looked up suddenly, saw me and said, 'In a few minutes I wish you to carry a letter to the official at the ya-men.' And that I do now."

"What does the letter say?" inquired Lin Farmer.

"I wished to know the same. This way instead of by the Great Road I came simply to have that maid in my house who studies, read it for me. Nothing new is there in it," Lu admitted with a disappointed air. "The young official is told that the school has been attacked; the yellow-haired foreign woman is gone no one knows where, and the watchman lies dead in the gate." His chest swelled with importance: "But I must not waste time — this is a very serious affair, a very serious affair!"

Ho-ming stood where she was and watched the gardener disappear down the lane. About her, neighbors drowned each other's voices in heated discussion. Over and over the same words repeated themselves in her mind: "How they entered the compound no one



knows. It was, however, not by way of the gate." "Not by way of the gate — not by way of the gate!"

And only a few days ago she, Sung Ho-ming, had foolishly told one who hated foreigners that under the great mulberry the wall was easy to climb. Memory overwhelmed her with snatches of talk during the past months — talk to which she had, engrossed with other interests, given little attention; talk of strange groups attacking the well-to-do and foreigners; talk from the Wen girl's own lips, "And when the outsiders least expect trouble, there it is!"

How could she have been so stupid, she asked herself, to play into the hands of this enemy? Once more her ready tongue had served her ill, and as a result a man had died and Miss Llewellyn was nowhere to be found. Dully she reëntered the house and went about the chores. These finished, she reached for her books and began to tie them up in the muslin cloth.

"Lu Gardener brought word that today the school does not open its gates to students," Mother reminded. "And since you have holiday, you might finish that piece of cloth on the loom."

While her fingers manipulated threads, her thoughts wove a pattern of their own. With the length of grass linen finished she would ask permission to go to the dispensary and learn more of this matter.

But when she arrived at the drug shop, only the manservant was to be found — Wei Ih-Seng had not yet returned from the foreign school. "These devils who managed that affair, would that I knew their

names!" the former expressed himself with fervor. "They may be the same as were here, and for this scar on my cheek I still owe them something."

Their conversation was interrupted by the entrance of a customer. Ho-ming slipped as usual toward the inner room; then stopped midway as she recognized Wen the Money-lender's gateman.

"Iodine and cloth to wrap a wound!" came the order.

Reaching for these articles, the manservant asked, "For what use?"

"Hurts on the young mistress's arm. Last night she fell on stones in the garden — though High Heaven knows her feet are large enough to hold her upright."

Oblivious to their listener who was struggling to subdue excitement over what she had just heard, the two men gossiped about various things. When the customer turned to leave, Ho-ming stepped forward. "I go with you, Gateman. Such wounds as your young mistress has must be treated carefully. For no other reason save that dirt was left in a cut did Lu the load-bearer lose his right hand."

Wei Ih-Seng's servant started to protest, but catching a side glance from the maid, he said nothing. Ten minutes later Ho-ming was ushered into the presence of a highly surprised hostess who wished to know at once, "Why are you here?"

"When I learned that you had an injured arm, I came to see if I could not care for it."

"And I paid that fool of a gateman to keep his mouth shut," blurted out the Wen girl, then to cover this slip

continued, "As though I wished a reputation throughout the town for clumsiness!"

The guest nodded in sympathy, "Is there anything servants will not tell given time? But it was good I heard. Very easy is it to have the blood ruined from such injuries!"

Her companion, however, was uninterested in talk. "In coming here you wasted heart," she asserted disagreeably. "I myself can attend to this small affair."

With offended dignity Ho-ming turned. "The mistake is mine — I go at once."

For a second there was silence, then the owner of the injured arm accepted the situation with a sullen frown. "Since you are here, you might as well help — hurt it does unto death."

After the proper amount of hesitation, the new nurse consented to look at the wound. "Hot water we must have!" she prescribed and a womanservant hobbled toward the kitchen. When the latter returned, Ho-ming began carefully to bathe the jagged cuts. In the deepest she found what she had anticipated — scrapings of plaster and a small sliver of glass. Sharply the patient watched this proceeding, "What have you there?" she demanded.

Her companion smeared this evidence on a scrap of gauze and, without looking up, answered, "Grit from the rock on which you fell." Before further questions could be asked, she caught up the bottle of iodine, "This, I warn you, will hurt!" But except for beads



of perspiration on her lip the Wen girl gave no other sign as the drug bit fiercely into the gashes.

When the pain had decreased, the patient asked calculatingly, "Why do you not study books today?"

"Have you not heard what happened? Last night the school was attacked by bandits; the watchman was killed and Miss Llewellyn disappeared."

"Ai-ya! And how do they know robbers did it?"

"Would anyone else trouble a school? Since all foreigners have money — Liu Teacher is held, no doubt, for ransom." She cut bandage and began binding it neatly about the arm.

"In your friend's trouble you carry your heart with ease! Surely you will miss her radio!"

"Not lately have I heard it. Other students go there, I do not." Ho-ming's eyes flashed darkly, "Strange ways of friendship these foreigners have!"

"Have I not said that many times?" triumphed the Wen girl. "Friends they call themselves and steal our land. Barbarians trying to tell us how to live!" She laughed harshly, "What civilization have they except for a few machines? Now that you have some quarrel with the yellow-haired one, your eyes begin to open." There was a pause freighted with suspicion, "The other day you did not talk thus!"

"Because not then had I been ——" Ho-ming refused to finish this sentence. "No more will I say, except that you have brains and I have been stupid beyond belief. But now I must go. When you have time, I wish to talk with you again."

"Plenty there is to tell," her companion said shortly, then with her thoughts apparently elsewhere she went on in an undertone, "So the servant died and not the old foreigner! But that other at least does not move, there among the dead."

For a breathless minute Ho-ming feared that the thudding of her own heart would reveal everything. She corked the iodine bottle, rolled the gauze bandage with care, and straightening up forced herself to say evenly, "Tomorrow have your woman do what I have done, but first be sure her hands are very clean. If healing does not come quickly, send for me!"

As swiftly as it had wandered, her hostess' attention returned. "I suppose I must thank you for coming," she admitted grudgingly. "If you wish, tell the gate-man to send you home in my ricksha!"

With no attempt to deliver this message, Ho-ming passed into the street. A favor from the Wen girl was something not to be endured. Well, from this visit much had been learned, but what lies she herself had told to gain the information — ai-ya! They had intended to kill Miss Bell and not the gatekeeper. As for Miss Llewellyn — "That other at least does not move, there among the dead!" "There among the dead!" Which dead? One only had died at the school — moreover, Liu Teacher was certainly not in that compound. But who else was dead, that the yellow-haired foreigner lay still among them? Who else was dead? With a rush enlightenment swept over

her — who — who but those in the graves on the low hills beyond the town?

Not for several years had she used such a pace as now over the remaining distance to the dispensary. There beside the door the ricksha coolie waited between the shafts of his little cart. Then Wei Ih-Seng was within the shop! Ho-ming hastened through the store toward the inner room. Before the latter could find breath for words, the doctor asked, "Why did you go to the money-lender's house?"

Courtesy was ignored as the reply came in another question, "Miss Llewellyn — has she been found?"

"Still they search."

"Then may I ask of the Honorable One a favor?"

"I listen."

"I wish to ride in Wei Ih-Seng's ricksha out to the graves. Too far it is to walk and I would hurry."

"What business have you there, may I ask?" Interest quickened the physician's voice.

"I think, Respected Healer, that Liu Teacher may be found in that place."

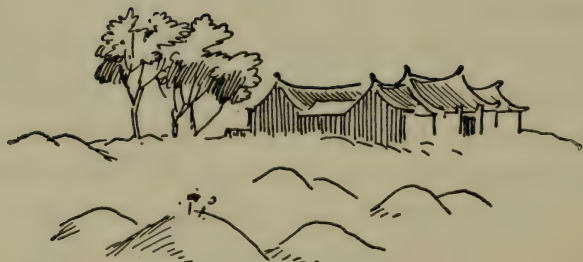
For an interminable minute the older woman deliberated, then she said, "Good, but I go with you to look into this affair!"

As the runner trotted swiftly along, Ho-ming explained the sudden visit to the Wen household and all that she had learned while there. In silence the doctor listened to this account. After a time she asked, "What made you suspect the returned student?"



Already they had left the town behind and were on an uneven road which wound among countless hummocks of grass. Ho-ming stared ahead. When she spoke, it was with difficulty, "Because I myself told the Wen girl an easy way to enter the school compound." Her voice broke uncertainly, "Much bitterness do I eat! But for my tongue, none of this might have happened."

Without warning the coolie stopped. "The cart can go no farther," he told them and lowered the shafts to the ground. His passengers alighted, then with a word from mistress to servant, all three commenced to study the scene about them.





## CHAPTER XI

### THE TERROR THAT WALKED IN THE HEAT

THE coolie made the discovery. His sudden exclamation brought the others in haste to where he stood pointing with fingers that shook. There to his left in a small ditch between new graves lay the foreign teacher. As they lifted the crumpled figure to a level patch of grass, Miss Llewellyn opened her eyes and cried, "Do not touch me! Do not touch me!"

"Have no fear!" Wei Ih-Seng's gentle voice soothed, "we are your friends, Liu Hsien-Seng." Then turning to the coolie she ordered, "Run to the shop for my bag! Bring also a bottle of water and call another runner with his cart to accompany you here!"

Later, on the cot in the dispensary, Miss Llewellyn told her story. Ever since the third anonymous note of warning had reached the school about a week earlier, she and Miss Bell had been sleeping together in a large room formerly occupied by boarding students. As Wei Ih-Seng knew, Li Principal had felt it her duty to inform the consular officials of possible danger to the two Americans, and an immediate order had come for Miss Bell and her compatriot to leave for the coast.

"This disturbed Miss Bell greatly," Liu Teacher told them. "Nothing ever happened to old-timers, she insisted, and for all the civil wars and bandit outrages, she felt much safer in this land than in her own Chicago or New York. I was a newcomer, of course, without experience. And when Miss Bell announced that, regardless of government advice, she intended remaining until school closed in June, I agreed to keep her company. Following this decision our personal belongings were stored under the classrooms where outsiders would hardly look for them. Each of us packed a few clothes in a bag, and arrangement was made with a boatman to transport us, if necessary, at any hour to Wuhu.

"Believing that every precaution had been taken, last night we retired with lighter hearts than for weeks. For a time we lay there and talked. Miss Bell said that she had more sympathy for these student uprisings than for similar movements she had known in the past. If she were a young Chinese, she, too, would want to take desperate measures against black-hearted politicians, she assured me.



“ ‘But why should they hate us?’ I asked.

“ ‘Why not?’ she returned. ‘For hundreds of years representatives of foreign nations have tried to exploit this land. None of our countries are blameless.’ She sighed and fell asleep.

“The next thing I knew my roommate was pulling at my shoulder. ‘Hush!’ she warned. ‘They have come.’ She thrust a dress at me. ‘Put that on and follow — I know a hiding place!’

“We crept down the back stairs, slid the bolt of a door, then stepped over the sill. At that moment strange shadows darted forward, seized us, and shouted, ‘Here they are! Here they are!’

“I tore free of my captors and raced toward the servants’ quarters in the gate. As I did so, I heard the watchman’s voice raised vehemently, ‘I tell you the foreign women left on the Wuhu bus today. I tell you they are gone!’ There was a scream. And then blows fell on me and I knew nothing more.” She shivered with recollection and sank back wearily on the pillow.

Later she continued, “When I regained consciousness, I lay where you found me. The sun was high in the heavens. My whole body ached, and as I tried to rise, everything went black. The rest you know. Now tell me what happened to the others!”

At midnight the two foreign women were carried to the previously chartered houseboat for Wuhu, safely concealed aboard, and started on their way. Outside the school gate, now barred and wearing the ya-men’s

seal of protection, two of the young official's guards marched up and down. Li Principal and the Chinese women teachers had left that afternoon for their native villages, where they would rest for a week. Only one member of the faculty, the old classics teacher, lived close to the town, and for him these days would mean an uninterrupted period of delight with books.

In the past hours more had happened than in many, many moons of ordinary life, Ho-ming told herself. She had, at least, been of use in finding Miss Llewellyn, but much time would pass before memory would permit her to forget the evil results of her own thoughtlessness. From the beginning, association with the money-lender's daughter had been flavored with danger. For her part in the affair, what punishment would the Wen girl suffer? she wondered. One had paid with his life in an effort to save those under his protection. Well, revenge on his persecutors would not bring back the watchman from the land of spirits. As for herself — all that she asked now was to return to school and there work harder than ever before.

But less than half of the night had passed when she was forced to realize that the familiar classrooms would not again echo to her tread, or to that of any other student. In the Hour of the Ox she joined a startled community in watching the place of learning leap in ever-growing flames toward the sky. And by morning there remained nothing of the compound across the fields save heaps of ashes and desolate smoking walls. While the ya-men guards strode before the

gate, the wall had again been climbed and the buildings fired.

So, having found entry an easy matter once, the second time had proved simpler still! Would this ball of calamity which she had started to unwind never reach an end? the distracted maid asked herself over and over. Now the school was gone forever, and that which at first had seemed trouble for others only, had put an abrupt end to her own future as well.

For three days Ho-ming made no effort to step outside the farmhouse. On the third evening Yuen-san told his family, "Yesterday the town elders called at the ya-men. They demanded that the Wen girl be punished for her part in recent troubles."

"How did they know she was guilty?" asked his sister.

"That I did not hear. The official would have preferred to do nothing about the matter — the money-lender, it is said, holds several of the former's gambling notes. But the elders insisted. One of them whispered something in the young man's ear. The listener, it is said, turned pale, then he wrote a letter to the father of the maid."

"And did you not learn what the elder threatened?" Lao-Po-Po interrupted.

"Would that I had, Grandmother! But after all, it was wasted effort. When Wen replied, it was to inform official and townspeople that in his house a daughter no longer dwelt. The night of the fire she had disappeared and for information telling where she was, her father would willingly pay a large reward."



"Such loss I call Good Fortune," asserted the old woman. "Why throw away money to find what is worthless?"

The following morning Mother paused in the midst of work to study Ho-ming's unhappy face. "Grief over what is past helps no one," she said quietly. "Better it is for you, I think, to go now to the dispensary and see what may be done there."

Indifferently her daughter set out. At the shop Wei Ih-Seng, recognizing the younger girl's mood, did nothing for a time to change it. When she spoke finally, it was to suggest, "Now that Wu Nurse has not returned here, how would you like to fill her place? Already you know a good deal and much there is that I shall teach you. As soon as this land settles a little in peace, you shall go to Nanking for study."

Ho-ming replied with the courtesy due such an occasion, but her eyes and voice held no enthusiasm.

Puzzling over this reaction, the doctor said, "The other day you spoke of telling the Wen girl an easy entrance to the school compound — what did you mean?"

Ho-ming winced. "Just that, Honorable Doctor! Together we watched them move Miss Bell's furniture. That other said with so strong a gate and so much broken glass on the wall, there was little need to fear thieves. The coping beneath the great mulberry, I told her, was free of glass. Several years earlier I had noticed it. That way, of course, they came in. She herself must have been careless in climbing; otherwise, her arm would not have received injury."

"But there was more glass under the mulberry tree than anywhere else, Sung Ho-ming. Four months ago when Li Principal received the first threat of danger she had a mason come and reënforce that spot. I myself saw it afterwards. No one could have climbed there without risk."

Ho-ming sat down suddenly on a stool. This was too much! She had, after all, done nothing toward endangering the school and these days of remorse had been unnecessary. But was that true? Would she, herself, free of responsibility, have been so hot-hearted about finding Miss Llewellyn? Not likely! Well, in this case Fortune had used her as its tool and to good effect. With a gayety of spirit not experienced since Lu Gardener had first appeared with news, she turned to the physician, "Ai! but I feel like a prisoner from whose neck the cangue has been lifted." After a thoughtful pause she added, "And tomorrow I become a real nurse!"

"Not so fast — not so fast!"

With a hint of her old mischief Ho-ming bowed deeply three times, then she said more soberly, "Thank you again, Honorable One — tonight I go home and sleep."

Two weeks later Mother handed her a letter. "The postman said this was for you."

Quizzically her daughter eyed it, then tore off the end of the long, narrow envelope. "The postmark on this will tell you nothing of where I am," began the Wen girl's hasty writing. "Perhaps even to send this

is foolish — not yet am I ten tenths sure of you — did you not tell me there was no glass on the wall beneath the great mulberry? For their cuts my comrades blamed me. That last time I saw you, however, you seemed to hate the foreigners. Almost was I ready to take you then to where our workers camped in the hills beyond the town — of use you might be to us — could you be trusted. But I was afraid you would tell the woman physician, and we had still much to do. Why you like that other I do not know. She does what the foreign dogs tell her, and if I had been with the group that attacked her shop, she would not have escaped so easily. But at least we rid the town of those others and their school! And our numbers increase constantly. For the good of our land we are willing to risk everything and should we die — with us shall die also officials and war lords and barbarians. If you wish to join us, write to this address in Shanghai and in time the word will come to me.” With this necessary information the letter abruptly ended.

“Who besides your sister writes to you?” Mother inquired.

“The money-lender’s daughter.”

“Not that one?” came in horrified protest. “And for what reason?”

“Lay down your heart, Respected Parent! Her letter does me no harm,” Ho-ming reassured, fingering the paper with conflicting emotions.

Overhearing this, Yuen-san volunteered, “If you know where she is, Wen will pay for the information.”



"I do not know where she is, nor do I care," his sister told him. And that was from the heart. For the rest of life, she thought hotly, she could do without seeing the Wen girl again. And yet in spite of the havoc wrought by the latter, Ho-ming could not but feel a grudging admiration for her. Two virtues the student from Shanghai possessed — courage and love of country, and while her ways of expressing patriotism might be questionable, it was, nevertheless, the most important interest in her life. In this town the youth movement had achieved only evil consequences. But who could say that in government and industrial centers they did no good? Even Miss Bell, marked for destruction by them, had admitted the justice of their cause.

Ho-ming looked once more at the letter, then became aware that her mother's face still wore its expression of concern. The maid smiled. "See," she said comfortingly, "I tear it into many little pieces — not again shall we waste a thought on so unimportant an affair."

In the year of training that followed, Ho-ming learned much. She was quick and deft and here, as formerly in the school, brain and hand were engaged actively every minute. Into the Public Health program she threw all of that energy which had once killed mosquitoes and concerned itself with various other exploits. At meetings the women enjoyed her youthful earnestness and said among themselves, "This daughter of the Sungs may yet go far."

"You speak truly. Once when our fourth son spilled hot bean oil on his bare feet, and the doctor was elsewhere, the maid knew what to do. She thinks quickly for one so young."

"And for eight nights while my mother-in-law lay ill, the Sung girl watched in my stead that I might sleep a little. Much good has the woman doctor done this town and teaching that one is not the least."

From those neighbors of Ho-ming who had once predicted, "The girl will come to no good end!" one now heard, "Did we not say the second daughter in the house across the street was brighter than most?"

Only Wu Nurse, sulking in the paper shop, remained silent about her successor.

Undisturbed by others' opinions, the subject of these remarks went on her way. She was enjoying the work every minute. Wei Doctor, thrown into contact with this fresh enthusiasm, grew daily less serious of manner. Their conversation was fretted with humor, and in this lighter atmosphere even the most nervous patrons of the dispensary lost all fears of modern medical methods. Once in a while the young nurse knew a faint despair concerning future study, but each time this recurred, she pushed it with determination into the background of her thoughts.

Shortly after the school fire, Wei Ih-Seng, recognizing the present poverty of the old classics teacher, had with her usual consideration invited the scholar to spend an hour or two each day at the drug shop. There for a small remuneration he attended to important

correspondence and further instructed his favorite pupil in the mysteries of the written language.

"This knowledge will serve you well when you study medicine," the doctor assured Ho-ming, holding constantly before her protégée the attractive possibility of advancement. Conditions, however, were more unsettled than ever. As the Wen girl had written, the groups of reformers grew proportionately with bandit and soldier hordes and, oddly enough, no one class of society escaped from this present wheel of persecution. Small merchants, artisans, and farmers, accustomed by history to being the foremost victims during such periods of chaos, now experienced a surprised satisfaction when greedy landowners and official despots in turn received punishment at the hands of ruthless youth. But neither the demands of the rich for succor nor the pleas of the poor seemed to disturb to any degree the government where it sat in Nanking, so absorbed in its petty attempts to quell political rebellions that it was blind and deaf to the terrible needs of the masses.

One morning Ho-ming threw down a newspaper in despair. "In another moon the National Government plans an attack on war lords of three provinces; two northern governors fight each other, and toward the southwest a new revolution starts. Nothing is there to read but news of battle! Had I much money I would give it to some great leader that he might fight all of the little generals who now destroy our people."

"Some great leader!" the doctor repeated, "and which one would that be? Moreover, fighting never



ends war." An unaccustomed bitterness crept into her voice. "Too readily do these militarists find silver — look at the good land everywhere sown with the poppy! Simply that generals may have opium to sell and thus pay troops and buy ammunition! Ignorant I am of government affairs, but one thing I know — had no one of the war lords a copper cash, soldiers would all return to the fields and trades where they belong, and grain and vegetables would soon uproot the poppies. A nation of peace-loving farmers we are, but because a few men have greed for power, millions perish!" Her expression was still indignant as she answered a call to the shop.

Ho-ming stood looking after her. Not often was Wei Ih-Seng's temper fired as at present. And what she had said was not unlike some of the Wen girl's statements, though her methods of curing the trouble were very different indeed. Which way was the better, older heads must decide. But would they? the maid asked herself with a puzzled frown — where were the thinkers that an end was not already put to strife?

Residing now at the drug shop, Ho-ming appeared in the Sung farmhouse only at odd moments. A bride had been chosen for Yuen-san and this young woman at present served her husband's mother as the latter had once obeyed Lao-Po-Po's whims. In this instance the relationship between the two generations was a pleasant one. Grandmother, growing feebler with each moon, alone refused to find any merit in the young wife.

"She scolds the poor maid always for not having your talents," Mother told Ho-ming one hot afternoon in the eighth month.

Her daughter laughed, "As you and I were once reminded daily that we lacked all virtue and wisdom. Long ago I told Mei-li that Yuen-san's wife would be fortunate beyond most in mothers-in-law," teased Ho-ming certain that her elder would blush at the compliment. Pleased with success in this, she went on, "Eager am I to see Mei-li's son. I hope she feeds him wisely! I would write her directions but she has forgotten the few characters she managed to learn." She smiled tolerantly, then rose to her feet. "Now I must go."

Sung Farmwife's eyes warmed as she looked at the girlish figure in its trim blue and white nursing uniform. The plumpness which in childhood had threatened to become fat was no longer visible; hair once called untidy by Mei-li now lay in two smooth coils behind the ears; and the "lump of clay" nose had managed to shape itself most satisfactorily; only the alert, questioning eyes remained unchanged. Twice had the family been approached in behalf of marriageable sons, but the maid knew nothing of this. Her parents were agreed on the question of giving their second daughter full benefit of the opportunity which Good Fortune had sent her way, and to place her now in the limiting confines of a poor farmhouse would be to defeat the progress of the last three years. Also their freedom of action was hampered by a feeling of appreciative obligation to the woman doctor. Even Lao-Po-Po, whose interest

in weddings surmounted the recently developed pride in her granddaughter's intelligence, admitted the justice of this attitude.

"Glad I shall be when the Great Heat ends for the year," Mother commented as she walked to the door. "Worse it seems than at any time I can remember." She squinted toward the sky. "Soon rain will fall, I think, but not before crops need it. Most of the plants are already dried brown from the sun."

Returning to the drug shop Ho-ming told herself that men as well as vegetables needed moisture. Specks of dust danced in the glaring light, and heat waves shimmered hazily before the eye, changing the outlines of buildings to queer, fantastic shapes.

At midnight as she tossed in discomfort under the mosquito netting about her bed, she heard the first patter of drops on the tiled roof. By morning rain was falling in torrents, and with the passing hours of the day this downfall increased in volume. For nearly two weeks the clouds dripped unceasingly. Streets were almost deserted. Housewives rushed about moving pans and tubs from old leaks to newer ones; shaking out garments on which mildew rose in gray, velvety growth; trying to dry drenched shoes and clothing in an atmosphere which but dampened them the more.

"The leather instrument cases are green with mold," Ho-ming exclaimed one morning in dismay as she searched for an oiled cloth with which to repair the damage.



"Yesterday at the tea house a traveler told the coolie that the whole Yangtze valley is flooded, and thousands of people are already homeless," replied the doctor.

That afternoon the rain ceased, but in spite of this the Wuhu bus did not appear on the highroad. Sinister reports now began to come through by telegraph. Not for centuries, these read, had the "Son of the Sea" risen to such heights. All of the dikes had given way and the figures now increased from thousands to millions of homeless people. Uncounted numbers of these had been swept away with their possessions. As many more were destitute, fleeing before the river's rage to higher land.

The community heard these calamitous details, expressed its sympathy with a click of the tongue, and then forgot the matter. Troubles they had of their own. Fields were still covered with water, and the beaten plants lay buried in inches of mud. Farmers moved dispiritedly about their homes and waited for the water to recede. This season, they told themselves with bitterness, their families would eat even less than usual as would most of those others who depended on them for food. Several had lost fowls as well as crops, and at Lin Farmer's a crippled pig drowned in twelve inches of water.

With the first sign of brightening sky, idleness vanished. Householders now hurried to repair thatched roofs and damaged mud walls. In those buildings so fortunate as to be protected by tiles, agile youths set

about readjusting what wind and water had displaced. That the season of Great Heat had ended with the rain was evident. Weather continued chill and damp in spite of a pale, yellow sun, and the physically weak found it difficult to adapt themselves to this sudden change in temperature.

Ho-ming, caring for a convalescent baby in a home located close to the highway just beyond her own end of town, stepped outside the door one morning to see if the tiny garments stretched on bamboo drying poles were ready for use. Disappointed, she rearranged the infant's clothing and turned again to the house. Before the entrance she paused. Coming down the road from the direction of Wuhu and the Great River appeared one of the strangest groups she had ever seen. A man, bearing on his back an older one, staggered in the lead. Following them was a woman with a child in her arms and another clinging to her free hand. A tall, thin lad, weighted down by a bedding roll from which dangled cooking utensils, dragged along at the rear.

"Come quickly," Ho-ming called excitedly to the farmwife within, "and look at these!"

On appearance the latter burst into ejaculation, and as if in response to this sound, the approaching man looked up dizzily, stumbled, and fell with his burden a few yards beyond the door.

The mother in this motley company watched with dull eyes. "Get up," she urged, but without emphasis. "Get up — the town is not far away; there we may find food."

From her husband there came no answer. Only the figure of the aged one lay where it had landed from the fall and whimpered.

"Get up!" the woman repeated in a querulous tone, then still receiving no reply, she sank down beside the silent form and began noiselessly to weep.

One of the smaller children at once added a feeble wail; the older of these two tugged weakly at a grass root and began to stuff this into its mouth. Gradually aware that his party had come to a halt, the third child dropped the roll from his shoulders and throwing himself down upon it sank at once into sleep.

Ho-ming stood spellbound while the characters in this small tragedy played their parts. Suddenly her heart turned over with pity. She moved forward and gently pulled the muddy root from the small girl's lips. The child protested. "Patience, Small Sister, and you shall have real food!" came the comforting promise, then kneeling down Wei Ih-Seng's young assistant bent professionally over the fallen man.

Whether or not the townspeople had time or interest to spare from their own troubles, the decision was not in their hands. The first of the flood refugees had arrived!



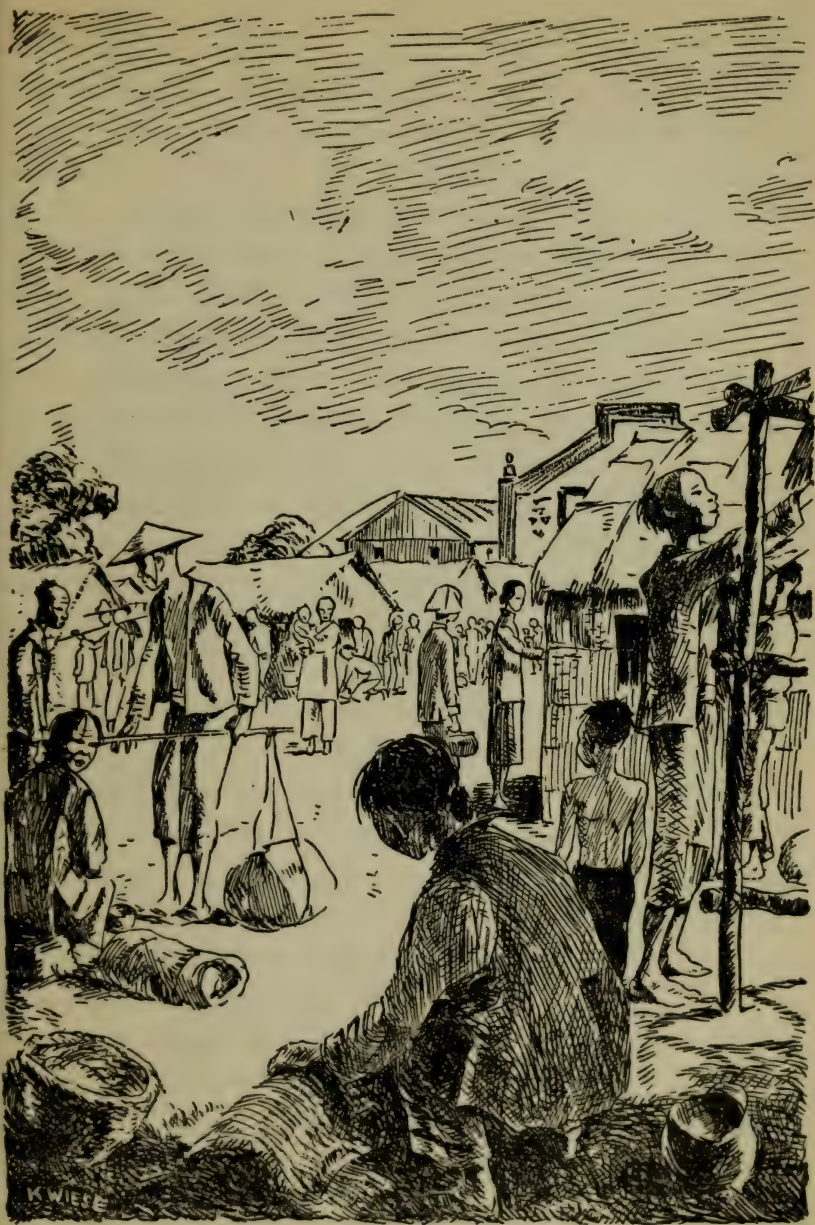




## CHAPTER XII

“THOUGH A SWORD BE SHARP, WITHOUT  
FREQUENT TRIPS TO THE GRINDSTONE,  
IT WILL NOT CUT”

**D**AY after day the starving filed into the little town, and with the arrival of each new group, the inhabitants grew increasingly desperate. Their uninvited guests, temporarily changed by calamity into animals with no desire save that of finding food and shelter, crowded the narrow thoroughfare and outlying lanes and petitioned unceasingly alms which most could ill afford to give. In their extremity the refugees approached poor and rich without discrimination. To them everyone who possessed a roof or a bowl from which to eat seemed favored of fortune. Even the



Ho-ming and Wei Ih-Seng now moved themselves to the mushroom-like village

town beggars, with an ironical twist of fate, became for the first time in their lives philanthropists rather than parasites.

And then when conditions seemed unendurable, the government came to the rescue. From the well-to-do all over the land and from the world at large funds poured into the national treasury for relief of the destitute. Refugee camps dotted strategic points near the flooded areas, and supplies were rushed to these by every available means of transportation. Airplanes flew above the inundated plains locating marooned families for boats to rescue. In this the nation had a common cause and a common danger. For a time war lords put aside their differences and restless students threw themselves into the task of saving others with the same zeal exercised formerly in persecuting those who disagreed with their policies.

Ho-ming and Wei Ih-Seng, working madly to treat the ill and exhausted, now moved themselves to the mushroom-like village which was being established on the outskirts of the town. Here an efficient representative of the government commission took charge of organization. When the first demands of food and medical treatment had been satisfied, there remained the problem of interesting these hopeless victims of nature's cruelty in something other than their own misery.

The artisans among them were soon set to work teaching the simpler forms of handicraft to their companions. Farmers whose toil-worn fingers had ached



under idleness, found a surprising satisfaction in creating objects of use and beauty from bits of bamboo or clay. Their womenfolk learned to make lace, to tie hairnets for foreign consumption, to weave tapestry of the sort purchased by tourists. As these novices became proficient, a small remuneration was exchanged for their achievements — and in possession of a few copper coins, men and women felt self-respect return.

Lectures, phonographs, and, most fascinating of all, a moving-picture machine served as recreation. This latter entertainment, enhanced by the exclamations of spectators, proved as exciting to Ho-ming as to anyone else in the camp — and the night the first film was shown, her patients received only what remained of an attention divided equally between the ancient glories of Peiping and those of modern New York.

"Travel I must some day!" she told the doctor breathlessly at bedtime. "But whether first to Peiping or New York I do not know."

"Great difference there is in distance and expense," laughed the physician, "though what man can foretell where he will end in life?" she finished soberly.

"In the foreign city is Miss Gray's home," Ho-ming went on. "I hoped I might see her in those crowds — but that, I suppose, would be too great fortune. Easy it is to understand why she does not come back."

"Miss Gray remained in America only because those in authority thought it foolish to spend money on her return when so much trouble threatened. Miss

Llewellyn was already here, and they cabled her to fill the position until June. Wise it was, indeed!"

A day or so later there appeared from Nanking a young woman with the charts and lesson manuals of the Thousand Character Movement about which Father had heard a traveler from the north speak several years earlier in the tea house. With these weapons she began her attack on illiteracy, and those stranded by the flood now learned among other things to read. Enviously students of sixty years compared their results with boys and girls of ten. The government representative smiled with satisfaction. Everything was as it should be here — and while his ingenuity was taxed to the utmost to explain occasional delay of supplies — the machinery of organization for the most part ran smoothly enough.

And then typhoid, entering noiselessly in a container of polluted water, made him change his mind.

Wei Ih-Seng took blood cultures frantically and sent out an immediate appeal for nurses and serum. To her amazement Wu Nurse appeared one morning at her elbow, "The one in authority here says he is glad for my help!"

"Much need there is of it!" came the generous acceptance.

Later in the day Ho-ming criticized, "Her daring is great indeed!"

"But her hands are capable! In work like this there is no place for personal quarrel," stated the other, as she caught up a test tube and hurried to the small

laboratory improvised only a few days before. Rebuked, Ho-ming accepted this attitude for herself, and in the succeeding association with Wu Nurse she managed to conceal any opinion she might once have had concerning the other's disloyalty.

That Wu Nurse, however, was sensitive about the past soon became apparent. She found a special delight in checking on Ho-ming's work. "You forgot to rub that patient with alcohol, Me-me," she would remind, watching with twisted mouth while the younger girl rushed to the chart beside the cot and discovered that the rubbing was not due for another half hour.

"That sheet has needed changing all day — would you have the Shanghai or the Wuhu nurse think you careless?" These irritating complaints seemed endless, and always were they prefaced or closed with the taunting title, "Small Sister."

But aside from the moments of their occurrence, Ho-ming had little time to dwell on these grievances. Nineteen cases there were now of the disease, and more were suspected. Her body moved automatically through the days. When brief periods of rest came, she sank into a sleep so heavy that only repeated summons forced her to wake. In this state of mental and physical weariness, she carried with her the constant fear of making mistakes. Wu Nurse's criticisms, groundless though they were, had, nevertheless, shaken the maid's confidence in her own accuracy. One evening, assigned to measure drugs for the others to administer, a greater drowsiness than usual seized her.



With determination she shook herself, bathed her eyes with cool water, then read the next prescription and carefully filled it.

At daybreak she stumbled sleepily between the cots to her own quarters only to find the physician there waiting. The latter's face, already haggard with weariness, now wore an expression of worry as well. "Who filled the prescriptions last night?" she asked in a subdued voice.

For the first time in hours all desire for sleep left Ho-ming. "I did."

"All of them?"

"All of them, Honorable One — why do you ask?"

Wei Ih-Seng seemed lost in thought for a moment, then she said with a serious expression, "Last night the old Ling woman died. When I saw her in the evening, I thought she would be here for several weeks. And so I still believe."

Ho-ming's heart missed a beat. "And a drug you think killed her?"

"I do not know. Wu Nurse said that she gave the patient only what I ordered for her, but —," she left the sentence unfinished.

Ho-ming was wordless. Not for a long time had she known such overwhelming fear. A patient had died, and a drug was the cause of it. A drug was the cause of it!

The doctor was regarding her protégée intently. "Try to remember, Sung Ho-ming, from which bottles you filled the orders on Wu Nurse's tray."

Together they moved to the shelf space where medicines and linens were stored. For a moment Ho-ming closed her eyes. Under the impact of fright, memory fled into dim channels. Then her developing maturity came to the rescue. She steadied. "From that and that and that," she said with conviction.

Her companion reached for the prescription list. When this had been studied, she asked only one more question, "You are sure you did not use any from those bottles on the top shelf?"

"I am sure."

But was she so certain? Ho-ming prodded herself later, restlessly turning on her cot. She could recall how sleep had possessed body and brain and the methods she had used to overcome it. Was it not possible that her hands had lifted down the wrong bottle? That would not have been easy — the drugs with power to kill were kept always in a little group to themselves to avoid just such mistakes as these. Somewhat reassured, she sank at last into a fitful sleep.

For the next two days she attended to her work mechanically. No longer was she conscious of weariness; sleep on duty, she believed, would never again tempt her! A nagging uncertainty possessed her. She could now remember having used a powerful drug for one of the Shanghai nurse's patients. Perhaps in pouring it out for this one she had forgotten to return the bottle to its proper niche after all and had used it again.

On the second evening Mother and Yuen-san called to see her.

"What is the matter?" asked Ho-ming anxiously. "Is someone ill at home?"

"Lay down your heart!" Mother counseled, "all are well." She paused as though disliking what she had next to say. "We came about you. We wish you to know that your family does not believe this talk."

Her daughter threw her a puzzled glance, "What talk?"

"That you are careless and, because of this, a woman died recently."

Ho-ming led them out of others' hearing. Yuen-san moved about surveying the camp, and the two women sank down on a bench where some artisan had left shavings and a broken knife. So, the younger told herself bitterly, the town believed that she had killed the woman named Ling. With a growing indignation she demanded suddenly, "Where did you hear this?"

"First from the neighbors; later your father learned it on the street. He was very angry. He made me come here at once to see you. We think it better that you return home for a little time to rest." Looking about her at the mass of huts and the administration tents, she concluded, "Work in this place must be beyond all strength!" and with rare demonstration of affection patted her daughter's hand.

Astonishingly, tears filled the maid's eyes and rolled slowly downward. "Ai-ya!" Mother exclaimed, "now I know you have some sickness! Not in years have I seen you weep."



Ho-ming forced a tremulous smile. "For a long time I have not seen myself do thus," she admitted, brushing the moisture away and rising to her feet. "Good you were to come, but now I must go. Many duties wait while I sit here, Respected Parent. Later when there is not so much illness, I shall go home and do nothing but sleep and eat your good food." With a farewell to the two of them she passed into the hospital section.

Helping her to lift a patient later that night, the Shanghai nurse remarked, "What is the matter, Sung Ho-ming? For days you have not smiled — even the patients notice it." Swayed by an impulse she could not explain Ho-ming repeated the story to the other. "Memory tells me I did not use the wrong drug for that patient, but at the time I was so sleepy, I do not know of a certainty."

The listener clicked a tongue in sympathy. "For ten years I have nursed, and do I not know how sleep seizes one?" She adjusted a bed cover and then stared suddenly at Ho-ming. "What night did that happen?"

"The one before last."

"That was the time!"

"What argument is this?" Wei Ih-Seng said, approaching the bed and examining its occupant.

"Two nights past," the Shanghai nurse explained, "I brought my tray of drugs and placed it on that table over there. Wu Nurse followed with hers. I took up the glass for Chen Mother, then setting it down

on the table edge, hurried to get her a sip of tea. Always she complains of the bitter taste and wishes to swallow something afterwards.

"When I returned, the glass was gone. Frightened, I asked Wu Nurse, 'What did you do with that medicine?'

"'Gave it to your patient to drink.'

"'Did you take it nicely, Chen Mother?' I asked. She smiled and reached for the tea. I thought no more of it."

Wei Ih-Seng turned and beckoned for Wu Nurse. "What is this about your giving medicine to the Chen patient? She is not in your care."

"I give drugs, Honorable Doctor, only to my own."

"And do you forget that which you gave to Chen Mother the other night when I went for her tea?" the Shanghai nurse interrupted.

"I do not know what you mean." Wu Nurse smiled, but her hands twitched.

The doctor settled the question by crossing to a bed. "Chen Mother," she asked, "think carefully! Night before last when your own nurse went for your tea, that other named Wu gave you medicine to drink, is it not so?"

The patient attempted evasion but failed. Finally she confessed, "While my nurse was gone, the other one leaned over and said, 'If you will not tell, I will pretend you have taken the bitter drug already.' Very kind it was — had I my wish I would never drink that medicine!" she protested childishly.

Wu Nurse paled. "And you take an old woman's word rather than mine, Honorable Doctor?"

The physician's voice was peculiarly gentle, "She has no reason to lie. Why did you do this?"

Wu Nurse's face began to twist, "The glass sat next my tray. I caught it up by mistake and gave it to the Ling woman. When I realized what I had done, I died with fear. There is nothing more!"

"So you blamed the affair on me!" Ho-ming said.

"That I did not! In my fright I said nothing. The doctor had told us the Ling woman could not live long, and I thought the death would be accepted naturally."

"Then why does the town accuse me of killing that patient?"

"One of the serving women overheard Wei Ih-seng question you about the prescriptions — naturally she gossiped." After a pause she continued hesitatingly, "Jealous I was of you, Sung Ho-ming, but not that much!"

"Nevertheless, you let your mistake rest on her body!" exclaimed the woman from Shanghai. "A fine nurse you are!"

"And is it good nursing," the physician interrupted, "to place medicine glasses where others are likely to confuse them? You, yourself, are not entirely blameless in this affair." She sighed wearily. "As though they do not die fast enough without our hastening them on their way!" Then turning to Wu Nurse she concluded, "Whether or not you spread talk of Sung Ho-ming through the town, help to correct these statements you must!"



Two months later with the epidemic conquered, the hospital workers settled back into normal routine. Many refugees had left the camp; those for whom the coming winter offered no way of earning food remained and pursued their new crafts and studies. Among the townspeople there was a growing interest in the activities of the camp. "Much do these refugees learn here, and shall we also not profit by what is at hand?" they asked each other.

Accordingly, the deserted foreign street chapel was thrown open to classes. Not to be outdone, a merchant offered the use of an empty shop, and students of all ages began to enroll. The doctor and Ho-ming, once more residing at the dispensary, found participation in these classes added to their medical duties. The young nurse's enthusiasm knew no bounds. These audiences, unlike those earlier groups attending lectures on Public Health, were made up equally of youth and age, and the former was eager to learn of modern ways. Ho-ming, helping in the Thousand Character lessons, lost no opportunity to talk of sanitation and hygiene, confident that some of her listeners at least would go home to practice what they had heard.

And then one morning the physician called out as she opened mail, "A letter has come from the Nanking Hospital saying that you may enter training at New Year's. They accept your experience here as half of their course. Also it is arranged that you attend special classes at the Girls' Boarding School so you may be prepared for higher courses later."

With no more warning than that, life's important gifts came to one, Ho-ming said to herself. True, since the flood, these central provinces had known comparative peace, but for so long had her desires been a part of the future, she could not yet think of them as near. When the affair had been discussed in detail, she inquired, "How shall I ever repay Wei Ih-Seng for so much expense?"

The doctor smiled, "Many more important subjects there are than money for talk between friends, or thus the sages have taught!"

"And who will help here in the drug shop?"

"Who but Wu Nurse? Much has she learned from her mistake; not again, I believe, will fear conquer her."

"Almost I am envious," Ho-ming admitted with a sigh that changed to laughter. "Truly, I do not know my own mind. Now that there is in my hand all that I wished, I find myself longing to remain here and work. With half of the town studying, it is difficult for me to leave." Her eyes danced mischievously. "Not elsewhere am I likely to receive such grave respect as in these classes! Moreover, I have talked with many about bringing their babies to be examined and admired on a certain day next spring, as the Peiping booklet suggested. A prize for the healthiest and another for the prettiest, I promised."

"That day I go home to my native village — not sufficient courage have I to face those mothers whose infants receive no gifts!" Wei Doctor announced in horrified tones.

"It is, perhaps, as well that I leave in two moons," her companion considered pensively, then asked, "Does it please the Honorable One for me to have holiday this afternoon? If I do not tell my family at once of this great fortune, I may wake and find it a dream."

Hours later, turning her steps once more toward the dispensary, she halted to look back across the fields. In the distance the ruins of the foreign school cut jagged black lines against the sunset. Long ago it seemed, she had stolen mulberry leaves from beyond that compound wall and at the same time envied Lu Gardener's daughter the chance to do books.

Far had been the path away from that small, restless maid and her anxious household. Mei-li's diligent figure moved now about a home of her own making; the teasing Yuen-san had become as settled a farmer as was to be found; Lao-Po-Po's sharp tongue expressed itself much less frequently. Only Father and Mother remained unchanged, accepting both good and evil fortune with that steadiness which was a part of them. As for herself—in the years past she had been lifted out of farm life and set in surroundings where heart and mind found a strange satisfaction; in the years still to come she would study as that one, her friend, had planned and then, following in the doctor's steps, she, Sung Ho-ming, would return again to the farm land and serve, here or some place else, where the need was great.

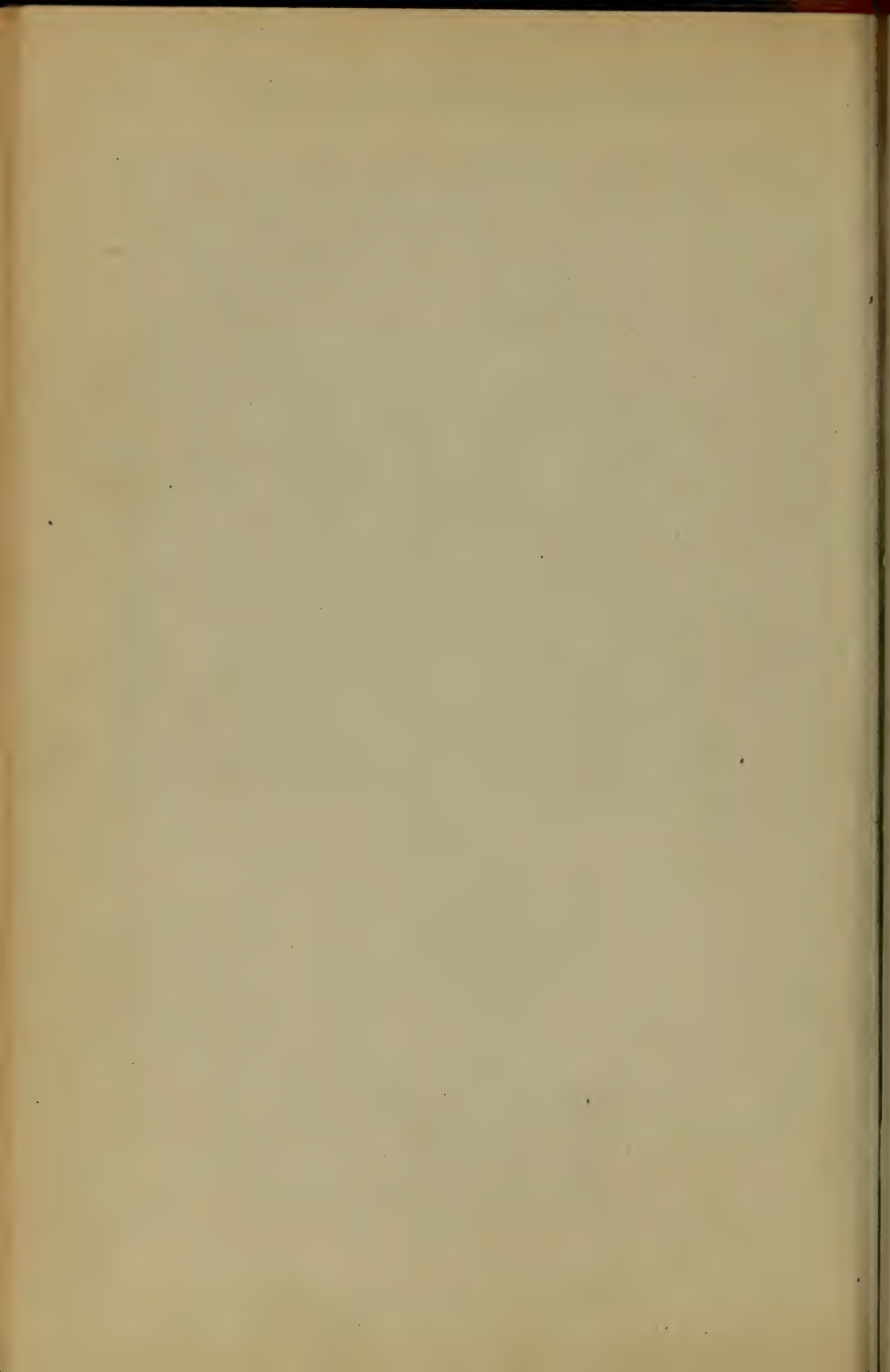
On a rising slope two lads ran with kites much as her brother and Hun-deh had done in former years. She



watched them start the toys in flight, then followed the ascent with her eyes. A dragon and a phoenix of paper and bamboo — China's two ancient symbols soaring high beyond humankind toward the blue, vaulted sky. For a time they kept pace, but after a little the dragon dipped slowly down — typical, she thought with a touch of fantasy, of her people's earthbound superstitions and prejudices. And continuing on its way upward was the sacred bird which, according to the old tales, rose ever triumphantly from its own ashes!

Within her, hope surged for this great country of which she was a part. Centuries of strife and desolation succeeded by periods golden with culture and peace — such had been the history of her land. Such would be its history again! Bandits and war lords, flood and famine — all would pass! Smiling in confidence she turned once more and continued through the dusk to the dispensary.





# GLOSSARY OF CHINESE WORDS

- AI-YA (ī-yā), an exclamation expressing surprise, dismay, and, sometimes, anger.
- BAH (ba), the numeral, eight.
- BAN KO, KUAI TSO (băn gō), across go; (kwī dzō), swiftly walk.
- CANGUE (kǎng), a heavy wooden collar worn by Chinese criminals.
- CHEN (chěn), a surname.
- C'HEO SI LA (c'hō sǐ lâ), ugly unto death.
- CHI (chē), the numeral, seven.
- CH'U YUAN (ch'ü yōōn), a poet and statesman of the fourth century B.C.
- CONFUCIUS, China's greatest teacher; founder of the nation's most widely accepted system of ethics and philosophy.
- DEN (dèn), a surname.
- DJIU (jōō), the numeral, nine.
- DO-FU (dō-fōō), bean-curd.
- ER (ēr), the numeral, two.
- FENG-SHUI (fèng-shwā), literally — wind, water, i.e., supernatural spirits supposed to travel through the air and in the water.
- FLOWERY DISEASE, smallpox.
- GREAT RIVER, a name for the Yangtse.
- GIAO (giou), a surname.
- GO-GO (gō-gō), big brother.
- GONG (gǎng), large pottery jar usually several feet in height and several feet in diameter at opening.
- HAI-HO (hī-hō), a chanting term used by laborers.
- HO-MING (hō-mǐng), a girl's name meaning 'bright water lily.'
- HSI (sh), the numeral, ten.
- HSIAO-BING (shou-bǐng), a flat, hard-baked dough cake.
- HSIEN-SENG (shen-sǔng), a title meaning teacher or gentleman.
- HUANG CH'AO (hwǎng chiou), a general famous for his cruelty.
- HUN-DEH (hǔn-dé), a boy's name.
- HWEI-CHIH (hwā-jè), girl's name meaning *precious jade*.
- IH (ē), the numeral, one.
- IH-SENG (ē-sèng), a title meaning *doctor*.
- JE-JE (jā-jā), big sister.
- JUNG (jǔng), a surname.
- KIANG-BEH (jǎng-bǔh), a name meaning *north of the river*.
- KUAN-YIN (gwǎn-yǐn), goddess of mercy.
- KWEI (gwā), an evil spirit; a devil.
- LAO-PO-PO (lou-pō'-pō), a title meaning *old grandmother*.
- LI (lē), a proper name. Also the word for one-third mile.



- LI TAI PO (lē tī pō), China's most popular poet of the eighth century A.D.
- LIN (līn), a surname.
- LING (līng), a surname.
- LIU (lē' yōō), a proper name.
- LU (lū), a donkey.
- LUH (lōō), the numeral, six.
- MANDARIN (mǎn'-dà-rīn), a Chinese public official of the higher class; also the official language.
- ME-ME (mā-mā), small sister.
- MEI-LI (mā-lē), beautiful plum blossom, a girl's name.
- MI-BAO (mē-bou), a ball of sweetened rice wrapped in a cornucopia made from a lotus leaf.
- MIDDLE KINGDOM, another name for China.
- MIEN (mīēn), vermicelli; long, fine noodles.
- MI-LO (mē-lō), the name of a river.
- MUH IU FA TZ (mū yōō fā dz), a phrase meaning *there is no help for it*.
- NANKING (nǎn-kīng), the capital city.
- PEIPING (bā-bīng), the modern name for Peking, the former capital.
- RIKSHA (rīk-shāw), small two-wheeled vehicle drawn by man power.
- SAN (sǎn), the numeral, three.
- SHAKING DISEASE, malaria.
- SHANGHAI (shǎng-hī), largest seaport in China.
- SHEN-MO (shēn-mō), what?
- SHRINKING DISEASE, bēri-bēri.
- SHUI-NIU (shwā-niōō), water buffalo.
- SI (sè), the numeral, four.
- SON OF THE SEA, another name for the Yangtse.
- SOO (sōō), a surname.
- SUNG (soong), a surname.
- TSU (dsōō), a surname.
- TU (tōō), a surname.
- TU FU (tōō fōō), China's greatest poet — a contemporary and friend of Li Tai Po.
- WANG (wǎng), a surname.
- WEI (wā), a surname.
- WEN (wen), a surname.
- WU (wōō), a proper name.
- WUHU (wōō-hōō), a port city on the Yangtze River.
- YA-MEN (yā-mǔn), an official residence containing police court, prisons, etc.
- YUEN-SAN (yōō-ēn-sǎn), a boy's name.

## NOTES

**Time.** The year is divided by seasons and the beginning of the first one, spring, is celebrated by the New Year festival. This makes the Chinese New Year fall on changing dates; usually it occurs early in February. The months, which are moons, contain twenty-nine or thirty days. In order to account for the extra days, a certain year may have two tenth moons, or two sixth moons, as the case may be. A day has twelve hours, each one of which equals two of ours. These hours are designated by animal names:

Hour of the Rat.....	11 P.M. to 1 A.M.
Hour of the Ox.....	1 A.M. to 3 A.M.
Hour of the Tiger.....	3 A.M. to 5 A.M.
Hour of the Hare.....	5 A.M. to 7 A.M.
Hour of the Dragon.....	7 A.M. to 9 A.M.
Hour of the Serpent.....	9 A.M. to 11 A.M.
Hour of the Horse.....	11 A.M. to 1 P.M.
Hour of the Sheep.....	1 P.M. to 3 P.M.
Hour of the Monkey.....	3 P.M. to 5 P.M.
Hour of the Cock.....	5 P.M. to 7 P.M.
Hour of the Dog.....	7 P.M. to 9 P.M.
Hour of the Pig.....	9 P.M. to 11 P.M.

Moons are not divided into weeks; nor is Sunday or any other rest day observed, save Feast Days.

**Superstitions.** Chinese life is permeated by the fear of evil spirits. The people have a high moral and ethical system which governs their action, but many of them, particularly among the lower classes, have fear as the keynote of their religion. The Dragon, in itself an enormous power for evil, controls the elements, dwells in the waterways and mountains, and terrorizes those who fear him into inactivity at time of danger. Priests, whether from sincerity or with thought of gain, foster this belief in evil spirits and prosper as a result. The better class Chinese wastes little thought on such matters; the study of the classics has taught him wisdom and beauty in daily living, and he pays small attention to spirits or Dragon. The idea of Feng-Shui (Wind-Water) carries with it all that is unseen and mysterious — the supernatural forces that untutored man fears most.

**Proverbs.** Many of the common sayings which to unfamiliar readers seem to be maxims or proverbs are sentences straight from

the classical books. These, taught and revered by scholars and repeated by the common man, are handed down from one generation to another, forming strong threads in the woven pattern of Chinese life.

**Slaves.** Small girls from destitute families are occasionally bought and sold in China. This term is used also in addressing free girls at times, but only by members of their families.

**Town and village.** The Chinese town is rather like a small city and is never to be confused with a village in size. These towns are surrounded by farm land, the fields in many instances crowding on the streets. An average Chinese farm is but an acre or so, and often even less, occupying space given in America to backyards.

**Thousand character lessons.** A condensed and simplified system of teaching the written language to those who would otherwise have no chance to learn. The movement, one of the greatest benefits conferred on the Chinese people in centuries, was given tremendous impetus by Yen Yü Chuen (Jimmy Yen), a Yale Doctor of Philosophy, first in work in France with coolies and later on his return to his native land. By attending these classes an hour a day for several months the student learns to read and write — a remarkable achievement for one faced under ordinary conditions by forty thousand odd characters. Due to it, many thousands of under-privileged Chinese have become literate in recent years. Unsettled conditions and constant strife have dealt these classes a blow, but progress is still being made.

**Social classes.** From time immemorial Chinese society has been divided into four main classes: scholars, farmers, artisans, and merchants.

The first group, the scholars, supplied the country with officials. These were appointed on the basis of character, background, and competitive examinations in the classics.

Second only to these were the agriculturists who furnished the food on which all of the other classes lived. Ranging from wealthy landowners to tenant-farmers, each of these tillers of the soil had a sense of his own importance to the nation at large. Each had a voice in directing the affairs of his community. Add to this the fact that more Chinese were engaged in agriculture than in any other pursuit and one begins to understand the political independence and the unfailing resistance to disaster which is so typical of the farming groups in China, even today.

The third class of artisans and laborers provided tools, implements, and all other objects necessary to daily living.

And to the last group, the merchants, fell the task of distributing all that the farmers grew and all that the craftsmen made.



